Commentary
April 2004

The Intelligence Mess: How It Happened, What to Do About It

Andrew C. McCarthy

Through the Eyes of Our Enemies
David Warren

Politics and the Israeli Novel
Hillel Halkin

Writing on the Brain
Joseph Epstein

The Company You Keep—A Story
John J. Clayton

The "Magic" of Gabriel García Márquez
Algis Valiunas

Fiddlers Three
Terry Teachout

Books in Review
Josh Chafetz • Mark Falcoff • Joseph Bottum
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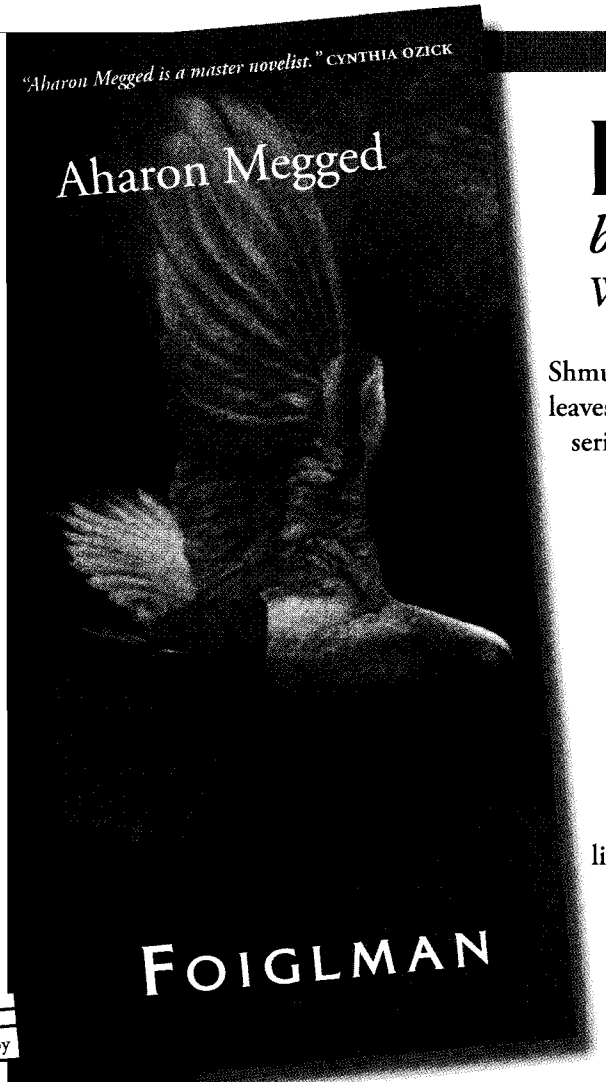
Neither can understand the other.



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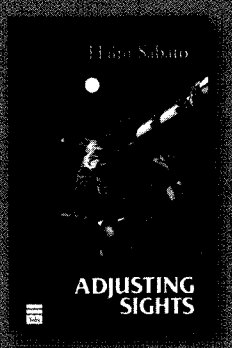

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Letters from Readers

Continental Divide

To the Editor:

Josef Joffe's "The Demons of Europe" [January] is so replete with dubious generalizations, straw men, and far-fetched excursions into mass psychology that rebuttal would require an essay of comparable length. But let me suggest a few points.

Mr. Joffe coins the term "anti-ism." It ostensibly describes a universal phenomenon, but he applies it exclusively to "the new anti-Semitism," defined as animus toward Israel and, by extrapolation, America. The elements of anti-ism, we learn, are "stereotyping," "denigration," "obsession," and "demonization." But Mr. Joffe himself stereotypes, denigrates, and demonizes his own target, observing that belief in updated anti-Semitic myths "seems to be the consensus of Europeans." His evidence: the recent EU poll that "declared Israel and the United States, in that order, to be the greatest threats to world peace." The issue is "more complicated" than the "reconditioning" of old hatred, Mr. Joffe allows. But it is characteristic of his tactics that he trots out fanatics like the French agitator José Bové as supposed exemplars of European opinion in general.

As for Mr. Joffe's attempt at collective psychoanalysis, let me see if I have it right. Since open anti-Semitism is no longer accepted in polite society in the wake of the Holocaust, Europeans displace it onto safer scapegoats—Israel and, by extension, the Zionist-ruled entity that they think America has become. Consumed by historical guilt, not only for their complicity in the mass murder of Jews 60 years ago but also for their indulgence in fascism and brutal colonialism, Europeans (not just the Germans) require the metamorphosis of past victims into present-day villains; it allows them to divert blame for their own fathers' "moral surrender to evil."

But opposition to Israeli actions can be explained persuasively without plumbing the depths of the European subconscious or waving the bloody shirt of anti-Semitism. One can in fact admire Israel's vibrant culture and vigorous democracy, understand its eminently justified security concerns and anguish over suicide bombings, and at the same time recoil, as many Israelis do, from the brutal, hate-breeding reprisals, the killing of Palestinian bystanders, and the constant encroachments on Arab land and freedoms.

I do not share the putatively widespread European opinion that Israel and the U.S. are the world's preeminent menaces, but to see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with all its ramifications, as the greatest threat to world peace is certainly a defensible view. Why not Chechnya, Tibet, Zimbabwe, or Algeria?, Mr. Joffe wonders. But those bloody internal repressions, horrific as they are, are not international time bombs. Nor is America complicit in them.

Andy Anderson
Bronxville, New York

To the Editor:

Josef Joffe asks why certain critics say nothing about the thousands killed in Africa, for instance, but are quick to criticize Israel for comparatively minor offenses. The fact is that, especially on the Left, Western countries are held to a much higher standard than those of the third world. The race or culture of the perpetrators, not the number of victims, determines the response.

This is why hardly anything was heard when 200,000 Roman Catholics (a quarter of the population) were killed in Muslim Indonesia's East Timor, or when an estimated 2 million non-Muslim southern Su-

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danese were killed by Muslim northern Sudanese. Imagine the outcry if a Western country, especially Israel, had perpetrated such atrocities.

JOHN C. ZIMMERMAN
University of Nevada
Las Vegas, Nevada

TO THE EDITOR:

Josef Joffe's "The Demons of Europe" is an exceptionally insightful analysis. Among its strengths is his definitive clarification of the difference between rational critiques of the United States and the irrational, visceral hostility denoted by anti-Americanism. As one who has written a fair amount about this matter over the past twenty years, I cannot think of any other piece that in a comparably short space accomplishes so much in shedding light on the sources of this phenomenon. Mr. Joffe's article should be required reading for all those who think that "if they hate us we must have done something wrong."

PAUL HOLLANDER
Northampton, Massachusetts

JOSEF JOFFE writes:

My cheery assumption that I write reasonably lucid English has almost broken under Andy Anderson's verbal assault. How can he so woefully (or willfully) misunderstand what I had to say? He writes that "opposition to Israeli actions can be explained persuasively without plumbing the depth of the European subconscious or waving the bloody shirt of anti-Semitism." Of course it can, and this is why I went to great lengths to explain the difference between rational policy critique and "anti-ism." Let me say it again, slowly: what distinguishes criticism from bigotry is the presence of stereotypes, denigration, obsession, and demonization. Since Mr. Anderson's letter displays a fine understanding of language, he has surely grasped my distinction, though he pretends that he has not.

Am I myself "denigrating" my targets? Yes, I confess to sinning against the postmodern faith according to which notions of good and bad, right and wrong are but subjective constructs or, worse, expressions of cultural hegemony. I thought we had disposed of neo- along with paleo-relativism back in Philosophy 101. Of course I want to denigrate anti-Semitism, and all forms of anti-ism, for these mindsets are both hateful and deadly.

Why did I resort to the metaphors of psychoanalysis? I did not do so lightly, knowing full well that such insights do not exactly enjoy the certitude of "two plus two equals four." But, alas, there are no better tools to crack the taboo that surrounds post-Holocaust anti-Semitism. When you are up against countless comparisons between Nazis and Israelis, between Bush and Hitler, when you see cartoons in the respectable European press like *Libération* or *La Stampa* that superimpose the images of a supposedly extinct Christian anti-Semitism on Israeli leaders, you know that this is not "rational" policy critique. And so you have to plumb the irrational and the hidden agendas (that are often hidden even to those who have them).

Finally, Mr. Anderson exculpates those who hate Israel but ignore far worse bloodshed in Chechnya or Algeria because these instances "are not international time bombs." So, we check our moral outrage at the door when realpolitik rears its mighty head and fear paralyzes our moral faculties? If Israel is the greatest threat to peace, then anything can be done to it, no? I do not think Mr. Anderson wants to go there.

John C. Zimmerman is right to point out that we tend to hold Western nations like Israel to higher standards than the yahoos who engage in mass murder. He is also right to imply, though he does not say so explicitly, that this "higher standard" is but a double standard that has no place in a detached moral discourse.

Finally to Paul Hollander, who drenches me in the finest compliments, I can only say: "If I agree with him, he is brilliant. If he agrees with me, he is a genius." Evidently, he is both.

Costs of War

TO THE EDITOR:

I was shocked by Victor Davis Hanson's comment that America's successes in the war in Iraq were achieved "all at a cost of a little over 400 lives" ["Iraq's Future—and Ours," January]. How can COMMENTARY allow such crassness to be printed? Would Mr. Hanson be so cavalier if one of those deaths was his child? Shame.

MORTON D. BOGDONOFF
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Many thanks for Victor Davis Hanson's brilliant and unanswerable article. In the 1930's, we faced a similar moral challenge, and though the West finally defeated the forces of darkness in World War II, it is now easy to forget how parlous that struggle was and how high the cost of victory, largely because of how long it took to muster the will to confront Hitler (and then Stalin and his heirs). After all, as far as European Jewry, the generations imprisoned in the Eastern bloc, and the kulaks were concerned, World War II was lost. Had France and England stood up to Hitler in the mid-1930's, when he began his deviltries, the war would have been, relatively speaking, a cakewalk. And had the U.S. entered the war well before 1942, it likely would have concluded earlier—and at much less cost.

So, too, today: if we do not muster the will to defeat decisively the current enemies of civilization, we may either lose the contest (if, for example, terrorists get hold of nuclear weapons) or win at a frightful cost. Mr. Hanson sounds a clarion call for continued vigilance.

GARY M. GILLMAN
Toronto, Canada

VICTOR DAVIS HANSON writes:

Morton D. Bogdonoff condemns me for "crassness" and a "cavalier" attitude in expressing relief that by January 2004 the United States had lost no more than 400 American lives in removing Saddam Hussein and liberating a once captive nation of nearly 30 million people. This is a serious charge.

Of course, every life is precious. That is why I and millions of other Americans were saddened that *any* of our fellow citizens were

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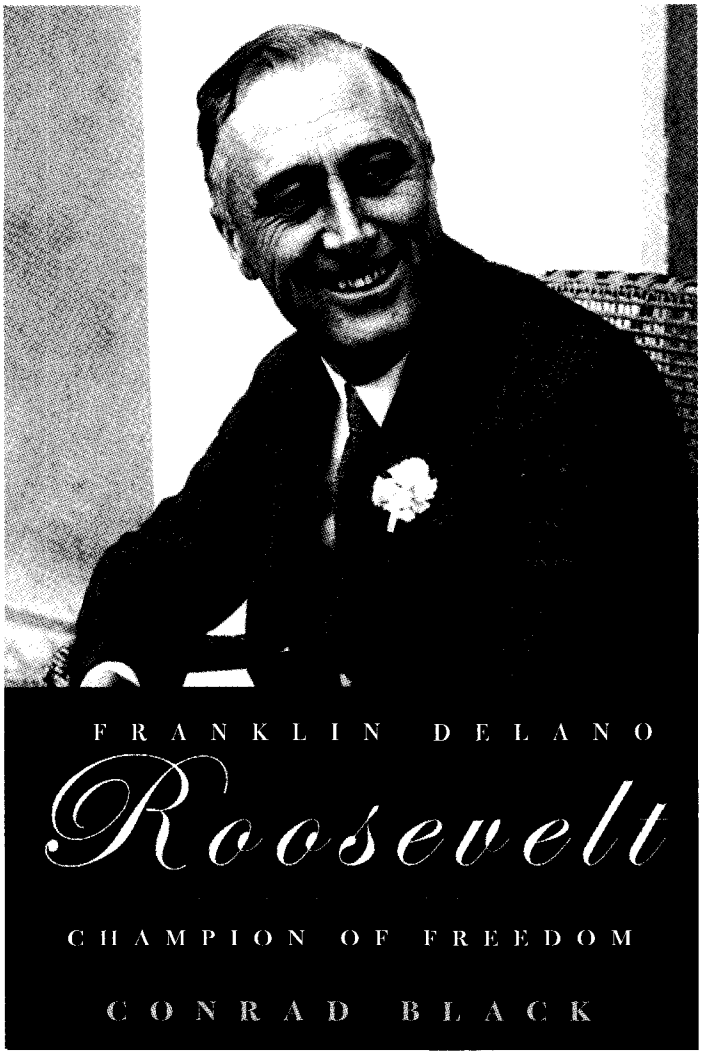

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sacrificed in this necessary undertaking. But it was precisely in that context of worry and remorse that we were also relieved, given the immensity of our task and the barbaric nature of our enemies, that our losses were not in the thousands, as in fact many critics of the war had predicted. History reminds us that such, indeed, are often the bloody wages of any campaign of such great daring and magnitude.

We should also never forget that we have been at war since September 11 to ensure that Middle East fascists and Islamic terrorists can neither commit mass murder again on American soil nor aid and abet those who try. In that context, it is a tribute to the courage and competence of our own armed forces that in both the Afghan and Iraqi campaigns they have tried to reduce casualties on the ground, among the civilian population, in a manner simply unprecedented in military history.

Finally, I need no reminder from Mr. Bogdonoff about the importance of acknowledging the sacrifice of the dead, or about the effect of such unbearable pain upon their families. In my recent book, *Ripples of Battle*, looking at three different periods of warfare, I explored some of these human consequences, which can ripple out over decades, if not centuries. War is not a parlor game of tactics or strategy, but an often horrific experience of human ruin and material destruction. In my book, I tried to chronicle how the death of one Victor Hanson on Okinawa on May 19, 1945 haunted, for the subsequent half-century, his farm family in the Central Valley of California—and yet his death was nevertheless part of a noble, larger effort of American fighting men and women to defeat Japanese fascists and put an end to the death and destruction that they had wrought upon the innocent.

I thank Gary M. Gillman for his kind words, especially his acknowledgement that resolute action against evil states is justifiable precisely because, in the terrible arithmetic of war, it can save rather than expend lives. At a time of recriminations here at home over the pace of our reconstruction efforts in Iraq, we must never lose sight that those who died and were maimed since October 2001 really have made the world a better and more secure place for millions of their fellow Americans, as well as for anyone else who seeks to live in peace and freedom. I do not think any of us can ever forget what they did or how much we owe them all.

Victim Studies

TO THE EDITOR:

In his recent article, Bartosz Jalowiecki tries to show that "Germans are being fed a diet of forgetfulness and lies" about their wartime past ["Lies the Germans Tell Themselves," January]. But it is difficult to discern from his account exactly which "lies" they are allegedly consuming or in what sense groups like the League of Expelled Germans are playing "fast and loose with history."

The ethnic cleansing of 15 million Germans from Eastern Europe and eastern Germany is hardly a "story of the so-called German 'expellees,'" as Mr. Jalowiecki puts it. There is nothing "so-called" about them, especially since 3 to 5 million of the expellees did not survive the process. It is neither a lie nor a "falsification of the past," as Mr. Jalowiecki claims. The horror did happen.

Mr. Jalowiecki accuses the Sudeten Germans of Czechoslovakia of "betraying the country of which they were citizens" in supporting incorporation of the Sudetenland into greater Germany. He forgets, however, that when the allies broke up the Austro-Hungarian empire after World War I and created Czechoslovakia, they assigned 3.5 million Germans against their will to live under Czech domination. Even President Woodrow Wilson is said to have been shocked when he realized the injustice done by the treaty of Versailles. "Why, [Czech president Tomas] Masaryk never told me that," he exclaimed upon learning that so many Germans were living in the Sudetenland.

Mr. Jalowiecki acknowledges that Germany's voluntary payment of $55 billion to Jewish survivors of the Holocaust is unparalleled in history, although he might want to update that number to about $70 billion. More importantly, however, he neglects to mention the 28.1 million acres of real estate Germany lost to Russia and Poland, the value of which—including hundreds of German villages and four major cities with housing, factories, and machinery—can conservatively be estimated at $2.3 trillion.

Mr. Jalowiecki writes about the suffering of Germany's victims, but it would have been instructive for him to recall also the atrocities committed at Katyn, Jedwabne, Nemmersdorf, Schwienlochtowitz, and Lamsdorf, not to mention the eleven Soviet concentration camps in East Germany established and maintained by Stalin for five years after World War II. These "monstrous crimes" perpetrated by the victorious allies prove that Germany did not have a monopoly on evil deeds. So one must ask again: where are the lies?

GUNTHER GREULICH
Lynnfield, Massachusetts

BARTOSZ JALOWIECKI writes:

Gunther Greulich asks, "Where are the lies?" A lie is a false statement or the conveyance of false images or impressions. In this case we are dealing with historical falsities, and they start with the word "expellee."

In my article I showed that Erika Steinbach, the present head of the League of Expellees, is no "expellee." She is the daughter of a Wehrmacht soldier who served on the eastern front. She lived in an occupied country; she was never expelled from a German house. Her own "expulsion" is the most obvious lie.

It is another lie to say that the majority of the Germans who left Central Europe were expelled. The truth is that at least half of them *fled* the approaching Red Army. If the League were honest, it would call itself the League of Escapees. That, however, would introduce questions about what its members were escaping from, and why. The answer would have to be this: Germans who left their homes and belongings in the East were hoping to avoid an even greater punishment for the crimes they had committed

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Sue Ann Prince, Editor

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Joseph Mali and Robert Wokler, Editors

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against the "nonhuman" Jews and the "subhuman" Slavs.

There were, we are told, 15 million German "expellees." This figure is bogus. The 1946 census, which was carried out in the four German occupation zones, counted over 9 million Germans who had arrived there from elsewhere. Most of them had been ordered to move westward by the Nazi authorities—months before the end of the war. A large portion of the 9 million were returning German soldiers.

The number of Germans actually forced to leave Poland (which acquired most of the German eastern territories in exchange for what it lost to the USSR) was about 500,000. More precisely, in 1945-46 the numbers were as follows: 42,000 from Lower Silesia, 150,000 from Upper Silesia, 103,000 from Western Pomerania, and about 40,000 from the area around the Baltic port city of Danzig/Gdansk. About 3 million Germans were expelled from Czechoslovakia and some from the Soviet Union. These figures are nowhere near the large numbers presented to us by Mr. Gruelich and the League.

As for the Sudeten Germans, those among them who supported the Nazi party did betray Czechoslovakia. Their motto was *Heim ins Reich*, or "back into the Reich." That, too, was a lie. The Sudetenland never belonged to Germany.

Mr. Greulich's financial calculations are impressive. But are they true? He does not set against the alleged $2.3 trillion in lost German real estate any of the work done by Jewish and Slavic slaves and forced laborers. The value of that work was rather significant, as the German war economy depended entirely on foreign laborers. For that reason alone, German material losses could never be so high as Mr. Greulich estimates.

But the problem is more serious. Mr. Greulich, like the League, is attempting to relativize German crimes. As he himself admits, the mention of material losses and the listing of other atrocities are meant to prove that Germany "did not have a monopoly on evil deeds." In this context, it is worth recalling that Adolf Hitler rose to power on the back of real and imagined German victimization after World War I. It is disturbing to hear Erika Steinbach and Mr. Greulich trying to resuscitate such feelings today.

Peace Plans

TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin's otherwise insightful critique of the Geneva Accord ["Beyond the Geneva Accord," January] suffers from a glaring oversight: demography, the issue that has driven erstwhile right-wingers like Ehud Olmert, Tzipi Livni, and Uzi Arad to support disengagement from the West Bank and Gaza. Rapid growth in the Palestinian population has been the fulcrum of left-wing peace proposals since the early 1970's, from the Allon Plan to the Yariv-Shem Tov formula, from Camp David to Geneva. Unrealistic as leftist hopes for reconciliation with the Palestinians may be, the pragmatic position of Labor Zionism in favor of partition has defeated by a knock-out the Right's ideological fantasy of greater Israel.

Given that Mr. Halkin himself endorses the Israeli security fence, is his passing nod to settler protestations against a "*Judenrein*" West Bank mere cover against charges of defeatism? Has he joined Shimon Peres in questioning Israel's squandering of untold billions on soon-to-be-abandoned settlement infrastructures? Has he come to doubt the wisdom of shifting thousands of Jews to the dunes of Gaza and the craggy hills of Samaria while losing the Negev to Bedouin settlement? No need to apologize, Mr. Halkin. Just help us start clearing the wreckage of a misconceived policy.

SAM SHUBE
Zur Hadassah, Israel

TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin offers yet another in a series of devastating critiques of the Geneva Accord that have appeared in print. But while Mr. Halkin contributes his usual eloquence, he and others miss a critical shortcoming of the pact. Even if the Accord were deemed absolutely perfect from the perspective of Israelis, it would make no difference, because the Palestinians are given a free pass to violate every agreement they sign. If there are no funds to back up the checks, it does not matter how professionally they have been printed.

YEHUDA ROSTKER
Far Rockaway, New York

HILLEL HALKIN writes:

Sam Shube's point about demography escapes me. I wrote in my article that, in an ideal solution, Jewish settlers would be allowed to live in a Palestinian state just as Palestinians live in a Jewish state. Since these Jews would remain citizens of Israel, and their Palestinian neighbors would be citizens of Palestine, what demographic disadvantages for a Jewish state would this have? But, alas, I agree that all this is now academic. The time for ideal solutions has passed. Demography dictates that Israel build its security fence to include as many Jewish settlers and as few Palestinians as possible. Settlers beyond the fence will have to be evacuated.

To Yehuda Rostker I would say that, under the Sharon government, the policy of giving the Palestinians "a free pass to violate every agreement they sign" has come to an end. I myself, at least, have not noticed any such "free passes" lately. If an agreement with the Palestinians, therefore, were "absolutely perfect" from an Israeli perspective, and if a government with the resolution of the current one could be trusted to enforce it, I would be inclined to take the risk. But again: this is now academic.

Correction

In "The Sino-Saudi Connection" by Gal Luft and Anne Korin (March), the sentence on page 26, column 1, "Last year, the People's Republic of China (PRC) superseded Mexico as the United States' main trading partner" should read: "Last year, the People's Republic of China (PRC) superseded Mexico as the United States' second largest trading partner." The largest trading partner remains Canada. We regret the error.—ED.

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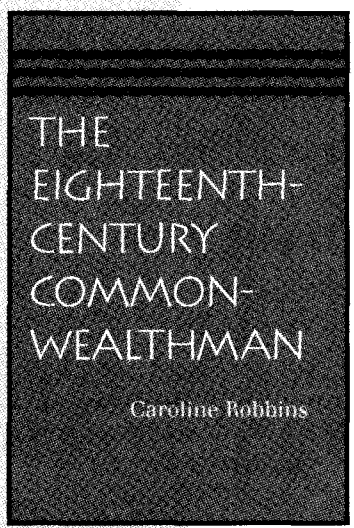

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In ***The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman***, Robbins adeptly presents a history of these men, whose writings advocated the principles of liberty in an era when change was considered perilous.

Caroline Robbins (1903–1999) was educated at the University of London, receiving her Ph.D. there before going to the United States. She taught history at Bryn Mawr College from 1929 to 1971 and was chairman of the department from 1957 to 1969.

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Commentary
April 2004

The Intelligence Mess: How It Happened, What to Do About It

Andrew C. McCarthy

INTELLIGENCE-GATHERING is something of a square peg in the round hole of contemporary political morality. It is about unearthing that which is willfully concealed, an enterprise that necessarily calls for invading privacy and inducing betrayal—discomfiting acts in an age that exalts the individual and his liberties above community and country. It is about assuming and preparing for the worst in an era that sees "bad" as an outmoded adjective for "different," another dash of enlivening spice in a rich social stew. Intelligence is gimlet eyes in a world of rose-colored glasses.

Now, however, that foreign pathologies long denied have visited their excesses upon us, many among the benignly tolerant have turned overnight into the equivalent of ambulance-chasers. In particular, they have confidently laid at the door of America's intelligence apparatus the success of America's enemies on September 11, 2001. Even as investigators in the CIA and FBI were unable to "connect the dots," it is said, nineteen al-Qaeda hijackers cavorted for months in this country before carrying out the atrocities of that day. Nor was this catastrophe—"by definition, the worst intelligence failure in our country's history," in the words of the Reagan-era intelligence expert Herbert Meyer—a singular phenomenon. Less than a year earlier, a billion-dollar battle ship, the *U.S.S. Cole*, had been bombed and nearly sunk, causing the deaths of seventeen servicemen, because we unwittingly berthed it in the al-Qaeda-infested port of Aden, Yemen. This, after our embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were turned to rubble in August 1998 by the very same al Qaeda, which had already attacked numerous times previously, and which no less often had expressly declared war on the United States.

Nor is *that* all. Thanks to our failed intelligence services (the indictment continues), the Bush administration grossly overestimated the stockpiles and production capacity of chemical, bacteriological, radiological, and nuclear weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq. In the meantime, in North Korea, construction of nuclear weapons seems to have ensued for years right under our noses. And Pyongyang's mischief marked only a single strand in a web of proliferation woven by our ally Pakistan, a web that may have spread into as many as seven nations, including Iran, where the mullahs now harbor the remnants of al Qaeda's leadership.

How did this wide wreckage in our intelligence capacities come about? One incisive answer has been given by Mark Riebling in his gripping history, *Wedge: How the Secret War between the FBI and CIA Has Endangered National Security* (1994, reissued in 2002 with a new epilogue). Riebling's thesis is that the problem is longstanding, that it has a

ANDREW C. MCCARTHY, *a former chief assistant U.S. attorney in New York, led the 1995 terrorism prosecution of Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman in connection with the first World Trade Center bombing. His reviews and essays have appeared in* COMMENTARY, National Review Online, *and other publications.*

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single "root cause," and that this root cause is institutional. In his telling, a full half-century's worth of national disasters—from Pearl Harbor through the Bay of Pigs, the Kennedy assassination, Watergate, Iran-Contra, and 9/11—can be traced directly to intelligence failures, and those failures were proximately caused by turf-battling between our two great rival agencies.

This has now become conventional wisdom, accepted on all sides. And one can see the apparent sense in it. A ramified system of multiple agencies having similar missions and chasing the same budget dollars will inevitably produce rivalry; rivalry begets pettiness, and pettiness begets failure. Such, indeed, is the reasoning behind virtually all of the proposals now under consideration by no fewer than seven assorted congressional committees, internal evaluators, and blue-ribbon panels charged with remedying the situation.

One proposed fix, supported by, among others, Senator John Edwards and James B. Steinberg, a deputy national security adviser in the Clinton administration, would create a new entity, analogous to Britain's MI-5, to assume the FBI's domestic-intelligence mission. Decoupling that agency's information-gathering from its law-enforcement duties would allegedly result in a specialist agency that would more resemble, and be less likely to rumble with, its foreign-intelligence counterpart, the CIA. These hoped-for efficiencies would, it is (naively) supposed, compensate for the loss of the FBI's critical power to leverage intelligence-gathering with the ready hammer of prosecution.

Steinberg and Senator Dianne Feinstein are also among those who would solve the pitfalls of conflicting bureaucracies by . . . adding another bureaucracy. This new National Intelligence Directorate would oversee the full spectrum of relevant entities, compelling the likes of the CIA, the FBI, the National Security Agency (NSA), the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the State Department's intelligence branch to play nice with each other. Presumably it would also render obsolete the Terrorist Threat Integration Center, another new entity (under CIA direction) created by President Bush a year ago to promote harmony.

II

BUT IS it true that inter-agency rivalry is the problem everyone claims it is?

That rivalry exists is indisputable; likewise, that its effects can be pernicious. One of my first encounters with the CIA a decade ago occurred when I and other prosecutors preparing the conspiracy case against the organization responsible for the 1993 World Trade Center (WTC) bombing asked the agency for a much-needed briefing. The CIA was perfectly willing to come to New York for that purpose—but not if our FBI case agents were going to be in the same room.

Nevertheless, like many facts that appall at first blush, internecine warfare is only, at best, half the story. For one thing, intelligence professionals are correct (if occasionally disingenuous) when they complain that the public has a skewed perception of their operations: while catastrophic lapses are always notorious, intelligence successes are more numerous. These, however, must typically be kept secret in order to preserve sources of information and methods of gathering it. The unfortunate result is a portrait of ceaseless "failure" that, aside from giving intelligence-gathering an undeserved bad name, also obscures other verities.

First, day-to-day cooperation among agencies, and particularly between the FBI and CIA, is actually far better than people have been led to believe. In terrorism cases, in the decade after the 1993 WTC bombing, teamwork improved in leaps and bounds. To be sure, there are occasional breakdowns, usually due to personality conflicts. But this is an unavoidable function of the human condition—which no legislation on earth can repeal—and it is just as frequently a factor in *intra*-agency disputes as in those between agencies. Today, agents who fail to compare notes are generally acting in violation of information-sharing protocols; it is hard to imagine additional directives improving the situation.

Second, intelligence-gathering is not monolithic. Domestic intelligence is radically different from the foreign variety, and both differ critically from the needs of the military. So polysemous an imperative requires a variety of skills to meet widely divergent situations and assumptions. As both a practical and a political matter, it is inconceivable that the task could be accomplished by a single agency, and proposals that suggest otherwise are certain only to reshuffle, rather than eradicate, natural rivalries while damaging the quality and quantity of information collection.

Third, and most misunderstood, rivalry—overall—is a virtue. In the government's vast monopoly, it is essential. Naturally, the seamy side of competition being a perennial best-seller, the public record is replete with hair-raising anecdotes of sharp-elbowed investigators pursuing the same

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quarry to the benefit of criminals, enemies, and traitors. On a macro level, however, the throat-cutting is statistically insignificant. As a rule, competition impels agents to test their premises and press for better information; it results in the generation of more leads and the collection and refinement of more intelligence. In a world where the Supreme Court cannot decide a case without *amicus* briefs from innumerable interested observers, where Congress declines to pass legislation without the input of scores of experts, do we really want the President, in matters of national security, reduced to a single stream of intelligence-collection and analysis?

If turf-battling is not an enormous obstacle, does that mean there are no obstacles? Hardly. The real problems, though, are not bureaucratic but structural and philosophical. They have taken over 40 years to metastasize, and they would take a lot more than cosmetic surgery to reverse, even assuming the national will to do it.

III

As with much else in our national life, the bacillus now grown to plague America's intelligence apparatus took root in the unrest of Vietnam and the upheaval of Watergate. The perception of national security became intertwined in those years with an increasingly unpopular war that ended badly. For a generation of activists soon to take up positions of influence in politics, academia, and the media, the antiwar movement inculcated a lasting aversion not only to the exercise of American military power but to the agencies tasked with assessing threats to our national security, not to mention the real-world grunt work of intelligence.

Watergate deepened the aversion. For one thing, the burglars included former intelligence officers. For another, President Richard Nixon enlisted the CIA to obstruct the FBI's investigation of the break-in. For a third, his White House "enemies" operation featured spying against domestic political adversaries. Hot on the heels of these misdeeds, the CIA became enmeshed in other domestic spying scandals that were subjected to high-profile probes, first by a commission appointed by President Ford and, in 1976, by the celebrated Senate Select Committee chaired by Frank Church.

Perhaps the first consequence of this chain of events was a long-term decline in the authority of the executive branch of government. The decline stemmed from an illogic that often bedevils the aftermath of scandal: the tendency to confound the sins of a corrupt actor (in this case, Nixon) with a structural weakness in the system itself. In the mid-1970's, the new operating premise was that, since robust presidential power was likely to be corrupted, it must therefore be scrutinized and shackled in every respect.

From this there followed a second consequence: a shift of national-security functions, prominently including intelligence-gathering, from the ambit of broad executive discretion to the area where executive action is regulated by Congress and the federal courts. Compared with the "intelligence failures" decried by journalists and politicians today, this shift engendered a continuing calamity.

In the constitutional license given to executive action, a gaping chasm exists between the realms of law enforcement and national security. In law enforcement, as former U.S. Attorney General William P. Barr explained in congressional testimony last October, government seeks to discipline an errant member of the body politic who has allegedly violated its rules. That member, who may be a citizen, an immigrant with lawful status, or even, in certain situations, an illegal alien, is vested with rights and protections under the U.S. Constitution. Courts are imposed as a bulwark against suspect executive action; presumptions exist in favor of privacy and innocence; and defendants and other subjects of investigation enjoy the assistance of counsel, whose basic job is to thwart government efforts to obtain information. The line drawn here is that it is preferable for the government to fail than for an innocent person to be wrongly convicted or otherwise deprived of his rights.

Not so the realm of national security, where government confronts a host of sovereign states and sub-national entities (particularly terrorist organizations) claiming the right to use force. Here the executive is not enforcing American law against a suspected criminal but exercising national-defense powers to protect against external threats. Foreign hostile operatives acting from without and within are not vested with rights under the American Constitution. The galvanizing national concern in this realm is to defeat the enemy, and as Barr puts it, "preserve the very foundation of all our civil liberties." The line drawn here is that government cannot be permitted to fail.

For these reasons, prior to the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate revolution, executive-branch authority in matters of national security had been almost plenary. The constitutional checks held by Congress were largely trifles. The power to declare war was already nearly an anachronism—during

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the Civil War, the Supreme Court had ruled that, regardless of whether Congress acts, Article II of the Constitution actually obliges the President to respond with all necessary force to put down attacks against the United States. Even Congress's power of the purse lacked much practical muscle, given the inherent political risk for a legislator who dared to withhold funds the President said were vital to national security.

In line with this, the executive branch had wide latitude to gather intelligence against potential threats. True, the CIA's charter did not permit it to conduct *domestic* intelligence-gathering—that task being left to the FBI—but this affected only which arms of the executive branch could spy on our enemies in which venues. It did not, at least in theory, affect the substance of the information to be gathered.

IV

BUT CATACLYSMIC changes were ahead, and their harbinger was President Jimmy Carter's acquiescence in the 1978 Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). Here, for the first time, Congress and the courts undertook to regulate the gathering of national intelligence, particularly by electronic eavesdropping, against agents of hostile foreign powers. In the Nixonian afterclap, it was adjudged that the executive could not be trusted unilaterally to wield this power, which might secretly be used against political opponents.

Of course, such wiretapping was already illegal, and the Nixon experience had amply demonstrated the political price to be paid for engaging in it. No matter. Henceforth, the executive branch would not be allowed to use whatever tactics it, as the branch with the most expertise and information, determined were necessary to protect the nation. Rather, it would be compelled to go to a federal FISA court newly created for the purpose, and, as with the procedure for criminal wiretaps, it would need to establish probable cause that the target was an agent of a foreign power. Electronic surveillance would be permitted only if the judges approved.

The impact on intelligence collection was serious. Previously, it would have been laughable to suggest that foreign enemy operatives had a right to conduct their perfidies in privacy—the Fourth Amendment prohibits only "unreasonable" searches, and there is nothing unreasonable about searching or recording people who threaten national security. (The federal courts have often recognized that the Constitution is not a suicide pact.) Now, such operatives became the beneficiaries of precisely such protection. Placing so severe a roadblock in the way of a crucial investigative technique necessarily meant both that the technique would be used less frequently (thereby reducing the quantity and quality of valuable intelligence) and that investigative resources would have to be diverted from intelligence-collection to the rigors of compliance with judicial procedures (which are cumbersome).

This was only the start of the debacle. Courts and the organized defense bar soon began to ply the FISA statute with hypothetical governmental abuses. What if, they worried, a national-security wiretap yielded evidence of an ordinary crime—not an unlikely event, given that terrorists tend to commit lots of ordinary crimes, including money laundering, identity fraud, etc. This was no problem under FISA as written: intelligence agents could simply pass the information to agents of the criminal law, who could then use the damning conversations in court. But what if such law-enforcement agents, for their part, were to try to use FISA as a *pretext* to investigate crimes for which they themselves lacked probable cause to secure a regular criminal wiretap?

In one sense, the suggestion was not out of line—wiretap conversations are devastating evidence, and defense lawyers routinely strain to have them suppressed. But the notion was logically absurd. If a criminal investigator was going to act corruptly, it would be far easier for him to fabricate evidence showing probable cause for a *regular* wiretap (by pretending, for example, to have an anonymous source who had bought illegal drugs from the target) than to trump up a national-security angle necessitating an additional set of internal approvals. Nor was there any indication that such chicanery was actually afoot. But reality is rarely an obstacle for those who see life as an ongoing law-school seminar. Gradually, courts rewrote FISA, grafting onto it a so-called "primary purpose" test requiring the government to establish not only probable cause that it was targeting operatives of a foreign power but also that its real reason for seeking surveillance was counterintelligence, not criminal prosecution.

As one would expect, this created among many prosecutors a grave apprehension about "the appearance of impropriety"—a hidebound concept governing lawyer ethics that is perfectly nonsensical in the life-and-death context of national security. Even as militant Islam began its terrorist war

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against the United States with the 1993 WTC bombing and the 1994-95 "Bojenka" plot to blow a dozen American airliners out of the sky over the Pacific, the Justice Department was worrying that agents and prosecutors might be perceived to be using intelligence-gathering authority to build criminal prosecutions. Often, the result was weeks or more of delay, during which identified terrorists who happened also to be committing quotidian crimes went unmonitored while the government dithered over whether to employ FISA or the criminal wiretap law. The insanity reached its apex in 1995 with the "primary purpose" guidelines drafted by the Clinton administration: henceforth, a firewall would be placed between criminal and national-security agents, generally barring them even from communicating with one another.

The damage from the firewall and the impediments to FISA has been incalculable. It took ten years to make the racketeering case against Sami al-Arian, the professor accused of helping run the murderous Palestinian Islamic Jihad from the campus of South Florida University, because the wealth of information collected by intelligence agents was withheld from their criminal counterparts. And that was a pittance compared with what happened in the waning weeks before the September 11 attacks. Zacarias Moussaoui, who had paid cash for pilot training (and was reported to authorities when his bizarre behavior—including intense interest in how cabin and cockpit doors worked—could no longer be ignored), was detained by the immigration service. Worried FBI intelligence agents were desperate to search his computer, but were turned down by supervisors who decided there was insufficient evidence to go to the FISA court. His al-Qaeda membership and numerous connections to the hijackers were not uncovered until after the attacks.

And the Moussaoui travesty itself pales in comparison to the story of Khalid al-Midhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi, excruciatingly recounted in *Slate* by Stewart Baker, general counsel of the National Security Agency during the early Clinton administration. The pair, who had trained to pilot planes, lived in California. In August 2001, an astute FBI intelligence agent was trying to find them, and asked the criminal division for help. But FBI headquarters stepped in and insisted that the firewall not be breached: criminal agents were to stay out of the intelligence effort. A few weeks later, al-Midhar and al-Hazmi plunged Flight 77 into the Pentagon, their manifold ties to Mohammed Atta and the other hijackers kept safely under wraps.

V

In attempting to "connect the dots" on how branches of our government erected barricades against efficient information-sharing, one cannot avoid addressing the most basic blunder of all. In the years after World War II, the designers of the CIA conceived of it as, in one sense, an analogue to the American military. Just as the armed forces are generally precluded by law from domestic policing (which is left to the FBI and other federal, state, and local agencies), so the CIA could not conduct its operations within U.S. territory.

The CIA, then, is confined to foreign intelligence and counterintelligence activities. When leads cross into U.S. territory, the FBI takes over—mainly through its foreign-counterintelligence division, which is separate from its law-enforcement side. This division of labor, and not simple rivalry, is the salient reason for the inter-agency warfare of the last half-century.

Turf aside, however, the structure is not analogous to the military doctrine of *posse comitatus*, which bars the armed forces from domestic policing. For if the United States were invaded by a foreign army, our military would respond; that would be a national-defense function, not policing. Similarly, hostile foreign operatives within the U.S.—plotting, recruiting, providing funding and material support to their principals—fit the mold of an invading foreign army far better than that of a criminal collaborator.

Yet U.S. law and tradition (strenuously supported by many of the same politicians who today bluster about the CIA's lack of dot-connecting skills) rig intelligence as if it were Russian roulette: the agency whose raison d'être is to counter foreign threats to our national security is precluded from participating in investigations once they cross into our nation, while the agency that is expected to pick up the ball and run with it from there does so without the CIA's depth of knowledge and expertise.

The ill-conception of this arrangement has become increasingly patent. With the info-tech revolution, al-Qaeda operatives seamlessly share information across borders with the click of a mouse, enabling them instantly to construct a complete picture of their prey. By contrast, the forces charged with keeping us safe from them are expected to complete awkward hand-offs as persons and information roam in and out of the country. The windfall beneficiary is, ironically, the terrorist operative who happens also to be an American cit-

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izen. Such an operative is not only protected by the full panoply of constitutional rights wherever in the world he travels but is radioactive to the CIA, which is no less fearful of the perception that it is spying on Americans than the Justice Department was about the appearance of misusing FISA.

VI

IT IS bad enough that, prior to 9/11, terrorists could easily survive in the lacunae of our domestic intelligence apparatus. Worse, they positively thrived on the way it operated.

Throughout the eight years of the Clinton administration, as militant Islam's jihad against America escalated, the federal courts became the linchpin of counterterror strategy. This began understandably enough. The 1993 WTC bombing was viewed as a domestic crime. Although, years later, investigators and journalists would link the bombing to al Qaeda, and al Qaeda in turn to prior terrorist acts against the U.S., at the time not much was known about Osama bin Laden, his network, and his national support systems in Afghanistan and Sudan. No one credibly could fault President Clinton for handling the matter as a court case or for not responding militarily. As the murder and mayhem grew, however, and as it became clearer that indictments were a pusillanimous response to suicide bombers geared to obliterate American embassies and naval destroyers, Clinton stayed the self-defeating course.

As Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has observed, weakness is provocative. The fecklessness of meeting terrorist attacks with court proceedings—trials that take years to prepare and months to present, and that, even when successful, neutralize only an infinitesimal percentage of the actual terrorist population—emboldened bin Laden. But just as hurtful was the government's promotion of terrorism trials in the first place. They were a useful vehicle if the strategic object was to orchestrate an appearance of justice being done. As a national-security strategy, they were suicidal, providing terrorists with a banquet of information they could never have dreamed of acquiring on their own.

Under discovery rules that apply to American criminal proceedings, the government is required to provide to accused persons any information in its possession that can be deemed "material to the preparation of the defense" or that is even arguably exculpatory. The more broadly indictments are drawn (and terrorism indictments tend to be among the broadest), the greater the trove of revelation. In addition, the government must disclose all prior statements made by witnesses it calls (and, often, witnesses it does not call).

This is a staggering quantum of information, certain to illuminate not only what the government knows about terrorist organizations but the intelligence agencies' methods and sources for obtaining that information. When, moreover, there is any dispute about whether a sensitive piece of information needs to be disclosed, the decision ends up being made by a judge on the basis of what a fair trial dictates, rather than by the executive branch on the basis of what public safety demands.

It is true that this mountain of intelligence is routinely surrendered along with appropriate judicial warnings: defendants may use it only in preparing for trial, and may not disseminate it for other purposes. Unfortunately, people who commit mass murder tend not to be terribly concerned about violating court orders (or, for that matter, about being hauled into court at all).

In 1995, just before trying the blind sheik (Omar Abdel Rahman) and eleven others, I duly complied with discovery law by writing a letter to the defense counsel listing 200 names of people who might be alleged as unindicted co-conspirators—i.e., people who were on the government's radar screen but whom there was insufficient evidence to charge. Six years later, my letter turned up as evidence in the trial of those who bombed our embassies in Africa. It seems that, within days of my having sent it, the letter had found its way to Sudan and was in the hands of bin Laden (who was on the list), having been fetched for him by an al-Qaeda operative who had gotten it from one of his associates.

Intelligence is dynamic. Over time, foreign terrorists and spies inevitably learn our tactics and adapt: consequently, we must refine and change those tactics. When we *purposely* tell them what we know—for what is blithely assumed to be the greater good of ensuring they get the same kind of fair trials as insider traders and tax cheats—we enable them not only to close the knowledge gap but to gain immense insight into our technological capacities, how our agencies think, and what our future moves are likely to be.

In considering the asserted "intelligence failures" of September 11 and beyond, it is worth bearing in mind this information bounty, which our government consciously decided to provide from 1993 through 2001 even as it was increasingly manifest that the enemy was growing more proficient, its attacks more deadly.

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VII

Although I have thus far been concentrating on the collection and analysis of intelligence here at home, a similar and complementary history can be constructed for what happened to our capabilities overseas. There, too, our intelligence apparatus was thoroughly compromised.

In particular, the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990's dovetailed with a severe economic recession that ultimately cost George H. W. Bush his presidency. For the CIA, this constellation of circumstances had two major, detrimental consequences.

First, desperate to cut spending wherever politically palatable, the federal government declared a "peace dividend." This was a fantasy. Although the fall of Soviet tyranny was an enormous blessing, it also presaged a *more* challenging international environment, filled with threats diffuse, unconventional, and less predictable. Nevertheless, at the urging of many of the same elected officials now complaining about failure, including Senator John F. Kerry, intelligence spending was repeatedly slashed.

The second nightmare for the CIA was President Clinton. For the first President Bush, himself a former CIA director, intelligence had been a priority. For Clinton, it was a nettlesome chore—and one he largely avoided. Clinton had no time even for James Woolsey, his own chosen director of Central Intelligence, declining to hold a single one-on-one meeting during Woolsey's maddening two-year tenure. This freeze-out had the predictable effects: agency morale plummeted, officers abandoned ship, and Congress's funding door slammed shut.

Human intelligence also fell into disrepair, having already fallen into disrepute. It is worth considering that almost all the terrorism prosecutions of the 1990's took place *after* successful attacks. We managed to stop exactly two such attacks: the 1994 Bojenka plot against the airliners, and a 1993 conspiracy to bomb New York City landmarks. The former success was due to sheer luck (a fire, started by inept chemical mixing on the part of two terrorists, was detected by an alert Manila police officer), combined with a Pakistani informant who was induced to turn in the ringleader. The latter happened because an informant penetrated the blind sheik's terror organization, recorded scores of conspiratorial conversations, and permitted agents to catch the plotters *in flagrante delicto*, stirring explosives. Sadly, that informant had actually infiltrated the group in 1991 but had been deactivated seven months before the 1993 WTC bombing (after which he was reinstated).

One cannot develop the necessary global network of intelligence informants without CIA case officers. As George Tenet, the current director, attested in a recent speech, by the time he took the helm in the fifth year of the Clinton administration the graduating class of case officers was at a historic nadir. As for the agency's clandestine-services program, Tenet elaborated, that was in such a shambles that it will take until 2009 before it is functioning at an acceptable level.

Meanwhile, abjuring clandestine operatives, Clinton-era intelligence went hi-tech, making extensive use of satellite surveillance and other advances in remote eavesdropping. But with fewer agents to translate and analyze what was gathered, or to follow leads, the effort was ineffectual. Consider: the 1998 embassy bombings in Africa, carried out by an organization we had been focusing on for five years, took several months to plan; ditto the 2000 strike on the *U.S.S. Cole* (which would have happened eight months earlier, to the *U.S.S. The Sullivans*, had not the terrorists' attack boat sunk from the heft of explosives). The attacks of September 11, 2001 were plotted on four continents for well over a year. We did not sniff out any of them.

As the CIA stumbled, the FBI was ascendant, opening a host of new legal-attaché offices around the world. Generally speaking, this was a positive development: just as the terrorist threat was exploding, so too was the spread and sophistication of criminal syndicates, making it imperative for law-enforcement agencies to cooperate internationally. But timing is everything. The FBI was spreading its wings just as its most significant cases involved not ordinary crimes but national security.

Some of our best information is obtained from foreign intelligence services. Naturally, those services are much less forthcoming if they think that what they tell us will have to be revealed in court because of U.S. legal rules. Historically, that was not much of a problem when dealing with the CIA; it is, however, always a concern for a country weighing whether to share some sensitive or potentially embarrassing information with the FBI. The Saudis' infamous obstruction of the FBI's efforts to investigate the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing is an exquisite example.

In the Clinton years, no matter how many times we were attacked, all the world knew that our approach was to have the FBI build criminal cases. Indeed, Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 39,

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issued in June 1995, announced that prosecuting terrorists and extraditing indicted terrorists held overseas were signature priorities of the administration. Nearly three years later, after several other attacks and public declarations of war by bin Laden, Clinton issued a press release that both trumpeted as a ringing success his strategy of having terrorists "apprehended, tried, and given severe prison sentences" and announced a new directive, PDD 62. This purported to "reinforce the mission of the many U.S. agencies charged with roles in defeating terrorism," including by means of the "apprehension and prosecution of terrorists." The embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were bombed less than three months later.

VIII

THE MANTRA that "9/11 changed everything" is omnipresent. But is it true? It is certainly true in one crucial sense: our national anti-terrorism strategy is no longer to fight bombs and militias with indictments and press releases. The military has reemerged as the spearhead, with law enforcement in an important but subordinate role. The ramifications have already been positive: simply by responding with force to our enemies, we have not just eliminated thousands of terrorists but accumulated volumes of vital intelligence.

But much still needs to change, and the prognosis is not hopeful. For one thing, we speak of intelligence "failures" as if they were current lapses, to be laid at the feet of the poor saps left without a chair just as the music stopped. And we speak about "fixes" without coming to terms with the nature of the problem; until we do, any such fixes will at best be palliatives, and will more likely make things worse.

Take Iraq's missing weapons of mass destruction. It may yet turn out that these will be found in Iraq itself, or that they were moved or hidden outside the country in the many months between when we first told Saddam Hussein we were coming and when at last we arrived to depose him. Still, for the moment the stubborn fact remains that the government said the WMD were there and they have not been located. Whose intelligence failure is that? Did our intelligence agencies "fail" in 2003, when, according to David Kay, even Saddam's Republican Guard believed Iraq possessed the weapons? Or did they "fail" in the 1990's when the government of the United States regarded the CIA, and spying, and human intelligence, and Iraq as one big pain that should just go away?

Hizballah killed well over 200 servicemen in the two Lebanon attacks of 1983. The blind sheik, and bin Laden after him, promised their adherents that a reprise or two of such "operations" would surely induce the Americans to cut and run from the Persian Gulf. Although we did not cut and run, we did stand by as Saddam Hussein put down a revolt we had incited with the materiel we let him keep. When Saddam tried to assassinate the first President Bush and when he expelled the UN inspectors, we lobbed a few missiles at useless targets—just as we did when bin Laden obliterated our embassies in Africa. In response to the *Cole* bombing, we did nothing.

Bin Laden struck us repeatedly in the eight years leading up to September 11. From the thousands in al Qaeda's swelling international ranks, we plucked about 40 and indicted them, bathing them in all the rights of American defendants, and arming them with information from our intelligence files to prepare their defenses. One of these, Mohammed Daoud al-'Owhali, had killed nearly 250 people by helping to drive a car bomb to the entrance of our embassy in Nairobi, and later confessed. Al-'Owhali was a soldier in a war on America, probably among the most effective ever. He was held not as a prisoner of war but as a criminal defendant, questioned not by the CIA but by FBI agents, who actually tried to give him *Miranda* warnings. When he was given a civilian trial, a U.S. judge initially ordered his confession suppressed—which would nearly have guaranteed his acquittal—because he had not been advised of his right to have an American defense lawyer present: a right that, since he was in the custody of Kenya, he did not have. The judge later relented, but only after issuing an opinion holding that foreign terrorists who attack America overseas should be accorded the benefits of the constitutional system it is their mission to destroy.

Was September 11 the worst *intelligence* failure in our country's history? Or was it, rather, a national failure, the failure of a country that allowed its sense of decency to overwhelm its instinct for survival and that effectively convinced its enemies that they could strike with impunity?

The problem with our intelligence apparatus, to repeat, is that we went on a national nap for over two decades. If an entity is systematically warped and mismanaged for 20 or 30 years—not by a single agency director or American President, but by a philosophy—it cannot be fixed overnight. You cannot wake up on Monday and say, "We need more informants," and expect to have them embedded and reporting by the close of the business day. If

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those lobbying for quick fixes to the intelligence mess do not appear to understand this, might it be because they do not want anyone to start probing whose mess it actually is?

IX

This is not to say that the U.S. intelligence apparatus needs fundamental restructuring. In my opinion, it does not. Instead, its primary needs are, first, time to reverse a quarter-century of sloth, and, second, adequate resources to build a new human-intelligence network. Beyond that, a few other things need to happen, but it is here especially that pessimism sets in.

Although there is no need to restructure the CIA and FBI, the division of labor between them must take account of new realities. Without losing the benefits of rivalry, it is imperative to eliminate the structural barriers that, assuming they ever made sense, make none now. In particular, in a national-security investigation, the overriding assumption must be that we are dealing not with potential criminals presumed innocent but with foreign enemies who must be brought to heel. This means that the CIA must be able to follow the trail of its intelligence into the U.S.

In short, I am proposing that the CIA be permitted to work in the United States against those who have been colorably associated with foreign powers, including terrorist groups. A number of safeguards can be put in place to assure Americans that we have not authorized Big Brother to run amok. In addition to requiring that the FBI be given notice and periodic updates, we could mandate that the CIA obtain authorization within 72 hours of the start of domestic surveillance.

My own preference is that this approval come from a responsible executive-branch official rather than from the courts. The FISA model, in my view, violates the principle of separation of powers, gets courts (which have no institutional expertise in, or ready access to, intelligence) into the business of micro-managing national security, discourages agents from pursuing investigations essential to public welfare, and confers upon enemy operatives benefits they should not have. Still, given that FISA is not going away, I would rather have a requirement to obtain FISA court authorization than a continuation of the outdated system in which, while al Qaeda can freely cruise from Peshawar to Peoria, the CIA gets turned away at the border.

Complementing this change, the FBI and the CIA should continue their increasingly effective cooperation outside the United States, with two caveats. The first is that the CIA (and the Defense Department) should be in the lead, the FBI in a secondary role except when the executive branch determines it is in our national interest to extradite to our criminal-justice system a terrorist held by a foreign sovereign. The second is that, the targets in this war being enemy combatants and not criminal suspects, they should not get *Miranda* warnings, American constitutional protections (except minimal due process, which our government must always accord), or lavish access to our sensitive files. Instead, they should be captured, held for however long active hostilities last, squeezed (humanely) for information, and, if they have violated the laws of war, given military tribunals.

Other commonsense steps to promote competent intelligence-collection were incorporated in the Patriot Act, enacted six weeks after the September 11 attacks. This act, however, has come under blistering assault; so vicious has the campaign been that sensible Democrats like Senator Feinstein and Senator Joseph Biden have been moved to join their voices to those of President Bush and Attorney General John Ashcroft in the act's defense. But it may be too little, too late: there are now more than a half-dozen proposals making their way through Congress seeking rollbacks or repeal.

The Patriot Act's intelligence improvements were vital, and nowhere more so than in the area of information-sharing. It dismantled the pernicious FISA firewall that prevented agents from pooling information. It authorized intelligence agents who were conducting FISA surveillance to "consult with federal law-enforcement officers to coordinate efforts to investigate or protect against" terrorism and other hostile acts. In addition, the act made it easier to obtain surveillance authorization, scotching the requirement that agents show that foreign counterintelligence was the "primary purpose" for their application in favor of the less burdensome certification that it was a "significant purpose."

But it is these crucial improvements that have come under greatest fire. First, in 2002, the FISA court itself took umbrage at Congress's demolition of the firewall and the (judicially invented) "primary purpose" test. Fortunately, the court's attempt to reestablish the suicidal status quo ante was blocked. Next, however, an amalgam of libertarian Republicans and anti-Bush Democrats has promised to limit the term of the bill's crucial provisions to December 31, 2005, when they are currently scheduled to "sunset" unless extended or made permanent by new legislation.

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This bipartisan Senate cabal (led by Democrats Patrick Leahy, Richard Durbin, and Harry Reid and Republicans Larry Craig and John Sununu) wants not only to terminate the FISA sharing provisions but to end the sharing of grand-jury information; to restrict the information that intelligence agencies may obtain from communications-service providers (the same kind of information long available to criminal investigators probing health-care fraud and gambling); and effectively to destroy the valuable "sneak-and-peak" search warrant (another longstanding tool in ordinary criminal investigations) that allows agents, with court approval, to search a location for intelligence purposes but not to seize anything, thus keeping the targets unaware. No doubt, the next time something goes boom, these Senators and their myriad sympathizers will be among the first to wail about unconnected dots.

A political class that appreciated the stakes involved would not indulge in this sort of recklessness. It would not hasten to dub every episodic setback an intelligence failure without asking searchingly whether we have set our agencies up to fail. It would have the necessary perseverance, through the inevitable torrent of catcalling, to retrace a quarter-century of missteps. And it would construct its remedies on the basis of a correct diagnosis of the disease. Right now, when we need it most, this is not the political class we have.

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Through the Eyes of Our Enemies

David Warren

One of the effects of the attacks on New York and Washington on the morning of September 11, 2001 was to create a surge in demand for translations of the Qur'an and for books about Islam. This was natural enough, for the people who massacred thousands of innocents had claimed to be acting for the glory of Allah. Likewise, the mass media began a frenetic search for experts on the Islamic religion and the Muslim world who might explain to Americans and others throughout "the West" how such a thing could have happened. Were the terrorists really orthodox Muslims, or were they agents of a psychopathic cult? Did the master terrorist, Osama bin Laden, enjoy a wide following? Was this a one-day wonder, or was it worse than Pearl Harbor—the first stroke in a full-scale clash of civilizations? How did Muslims in general look upon the West, what did they think of us? And if they hated us, "Why do they hate us?"

Books that had lain dormant on remainder shelves suddenly came to life; some that had been long out of print were exhumed; and many instant books were commissioned—more than 300 in the first year alone. At various levels of expertise and from various points of view, such writers as Karen Armstrong, Stephen Schwartz, Malise Ruthven, Victor Davis Hanson, Dilip Hiro, Richard Fletcher, Ahmed Rashid, Yossef Bodansky, Peter L. Bergen, "Ibn Warraq," Daniel Pipes, and Steven Emerson went from relative obscurity to best-sellerdom. The West's greatest living historian of Islam, Bernard Lewis, became a household name. And for a while it seemed that almost every public intellectual and talking head felt compelled to repackage himself as an authority on the "war on terror."

When it came to Islam, a note sounded early and often was the note of liberal tolerance. In this, George W. Bush took the lead. Within a week of the terror strikes, the President appeared at the Saudi-funded Islamic Center in Washington to declare that "Islam is a religion of peace." He has made innumerable such pronouncements since, becoming America's most visible imam as he stresses the sanctity of Muslim lives and property and the innocence of the Muslim masses. The President has introduced a White House tradition of Iftaar (Ramadan fast-breaking), and quoted passages from the Qur'an. I am in receipt of one of his cards for Eid al-Fitr, which informs me that Islam promotes "justice, compassion, and personal responsibility."

The President's aspirations to tolerance and decency were universally echoed in the mainstream media in the days after the terrorist strikes. Television anchors like Peter Jennings regularly warned viewers not to jump to conclusions about Islam or anything connected with it; the networks even suppressed film footage of Palestinians celebrating the destruction of the World Trade Center at sponta-

David Warren *is a columnist and commentator on international affairs for the* Ottawa Citizen. *His "Lahore; or, the Islamic Gale" appeared in our February 2003 issue.*

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neous demonstrations in Gaza and Ramallah. A parade of media-suborned academics begged us to remove our own cultural blinders, to see ourselves as others see us.

To be sure, other views were expressed as well. Franklin Graham, a powerful evangelical Christian leader who had delivered the benediction at President Bush's inauguration, noted memorably that "It wasn't Methodists flying into those buildings, it wasn't Lutherans. It was an attack on this country by people of the Islamic faith." And while Bush was wishing the world's one billion Muslims "health, prosperity, and happiness during Ramadan," Rev. Graham was saying that they were "wicked, violent, and not of the same God."

But these remarks (which the Christian leader has since qualified) were by no means widely shared, and were emphatically repudiated—as were other, less vivid suggestions of an implacable clash of civilizations. Some among the repudiators decried the resurrection of ancient racial and cultural stereotypes. Others observed the irony inherent in the inability of a modern Western culture that values tolerance, pluralism, and equality to understand an ancient Eastern culture that does not. Many meditated upon the strange phenomenon of "otherness," and the perils of cross-cultural judgment.

Who was better informed about Islam, Osama bin Laden or George W. Bush? Were any of our Western experts truly well informed, and if so, which ones? What of the experts we imagined on the Muslim side? Were they knowledgeable about America and the West? Who were they, anyway, and what were they saying?

In the shock of 9/11, such questions were brought to the surface as if for the first time. But they were hardly new questions. How the West understands the East has been a source of intense academic controversy for at least a generation, and that controversy itself looks back upon many centuries of encounter between Islam and what was once called "Christendom." With the passage of time, and through the great cloud of information that has been kicked up, we may begin to see how older debates illuminate the current one.

EDWARD SAID, who died last September, was the man who touched off the contemporary controversy over "Orientalism" that preceded the present "war on terror." Born in Jerusalem into a wealthy Arab Christian family, Said was raised mostly in Cairo, educated at Princeton and Harvard, and for many years taught English and comparative literature at Columbia University in New York. A radical activist in the cause of an independent Palestine, he served as an overseas member of the Palestinian National Council, an arm of the PLO, until breaking with Yasir Arafat over the Oslo accords (he thought Arafat had sold out).

Said's chief claim to fame is likely to remain his 1978 book, *Orientalism*. This was an attack on the long line of British, French, and, later, American scholars, travelers, and imaginative writers who had undertaken to interpret the Near East over roughly the previous two centuries. All these Western interpreters, Said argued in *Orientalism*, had adopted a consistently a-priori view of the region. All tended to characterize it as an exotic, degenerate, sensual, violent, fanatical, aberrant neverland, incapable of development or reform. And all tended to attribute this incapacity to the stifling effects of the Islamic tradition.

Assuming, with the French structuralists of the 1960's, that every civilization defines itself by its "Other," Said reached as far back as Homer's *Iliad*, Aeschylus' *Persians*, and Euripedes' *Bacchae* to reveal the literary underpinnings of the West's "othering" of the East. Assuming with Michel Foucault that knowledge always generates power, he proceeded to maintain that Orientalism—far from being the objective, disinterested, and rather esoteric field of inquiry it claimed to be—had from the very beginnings served the political ends of European aggression, and in the modern age served both prospectively and retrospectively to justify Anglo-French colonialism, hegemony, and control. Finally, assuming the "essentialism" of this European view, Said held that the description of the Near East in the works of all the Orientalists was necessarily inaccurate, distorted, and false.

Said's attack was very broad. It took in not only the proponents of imperialism and neo-colonialism who needed arguments to buttress their claims of superiority, and not only the purveyors (and consumers) of popular or sensationalist accounts of the "mysterious East," but top-shelf writers (Kipling most conspicuously but even such outwardly sympathetic authors as Yeats, Conrad, and Camus) and, above all, professional and reputedly objective scholars. Here Said attempted to undermine the reputations of such towering figures as H.A.R. Gibb (1895-1971), the doyen of English Arabists in his time, and Louis Massignon (1883-1962), the equivalent figure in France.

Polemical but engagingly written, Said's *Orientalism* could at times be perceptive and entertaining. The book presented itself as a pioneering exercise in "postmodern irony," for the West to

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which Said referred, and with which he himself frequently identified, was the West of Enlightenment humanism—and here he was, using its "discourse" to convict the Enlightenment tradition itself of complicity in colonialism and imperialism. A master of the liberated, secular, enlightened drawing room, he was in effect denying not only its right to investigate the lives of the "unenlightened" but even its basic humanity.

While Said's idea of Orientalism came under a certain amount of return fire from within the bastions of the traditional academy, it was gleefully welcomed by a new generation of scholars, eager to be free of the shackles of the old disciplines, especially the linguistic ones (for in addition to classical Arabic, the old-fashioned Orientalist had also to wrestle with Turkish, Persian, Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, German, and French). When Said wrote his book, the word "Orientalism" was already beginning to be used among progressive academics in a dry, insinuating manner. He was able to create a new academic industry by elegantly clinching the sneer.

In the decades since 1978, innumerable papers have been written, and innumerable degrees granted, for extensions to Said's celebrated "insight." Redefined from its much older, more innocent usage—meaning mainly the study of the Near East—Orientalism became a byword across the social sciences, in literary theory, and in all related disciplines. Very quickly applied to almost every interaction between a powerful, hegemonic West and an East no longer restricted to the Arab or even to the Islamic countries, both "Orientalism" and *Orientalism* came to serve as canonical reference points for the politically correct field now known as "victim studies."

It was the events of 9/11 that made inevitable a public revisiting of Orientalism, for on that day the mysterious East we had been imaginatively constructing through our "hegemonic discourse" had, it seemed, suddenly turned around to bite us. Said, who was by this time dying of leukemia, took in the news and wrote acidly in the London *Observer* about "the vague suggestion that the Middle East and Islam are what 'we' are up against." It was as if he were passing the torch to the next generation.

Enter Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, two public intellectuals who, in response to the fury now being directed against the West, have flipped Said's model of Orientalism on its head. Their new book, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies*,* is an elaboration of an article they co-authored in the *New York Review of Books* two years ago. Buruma is a Dutch-born journalist and traveler whose long experience of Japan has led him to find parallels to contemporary Islamic jihadists in Japan's kamikaze past. Margalit is a political essayist and a professor of philosophy at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He was a protégé of Isaiah Berlin, and a founder of Peace Now.

The new book echoes even as it inverts Said's thesis. As "Orientalism" was a handy term with which to conflate those in the West who hold a malignly simplistic view of the East, "Occidentalism" is a handy term with which to conflate those in the East who hold a malignly simplistic view of the West. Buruma and Margalit disclaim any desire to provide a unified theory of everything, proposing instead to look into ideas and assumptions that have fueled various ostensibly anti-Western movements over time. Perhaps their most effective example is the one with which their book opens: an intellectual conference in Kyoto in the summer of 1942, convened six months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and devoted explicitly to "Overcoming the Modern." There, the assembled Far Eastern writers and thinkers wistfully evoked a distinctively "Asian spirituality," while serving the interests of contemporary militarist thugs.

As Buruma and Margalit suggest, much of what is anti-Western in the East today was in former generations a critique of modernity from *within* the West. They mention the pan-German stirrings of the 18th century, which contrasted the pastoral and spiritual qualities of pre-industrial Germany with the alien and soulless metropolitan culture of post-industrial London and Paris; or, later, the pan-Slavic stirrings in Russia against an alien West that now incorporated Germany. Even as Berlin and then Moscow tried desperately to catch up with the industrial age, an important constituency resented the impact of modern goods, manners, and ideas, finding literary expression in writers as sophisticated as Herder and Dostoevsky. And very Western forms of idealism and romanticism went underground to resurface as racial theories.

From the West the wave continued to the East. By the 20th century, write Buruma and Margalit, it was the turn of many Japanese to lament the "contamination" of Tokyo and Osaka by the movies, cafés, dance halls, radios, newspapers, short skirts, and cars that had become symbols of Western cultural hegemony. Although large cities in themselves were not a novelty in the East—Baghdad, Peking, and Edo were vast metropolitan centers long before London—the supposed atomization of the city by the importation of Western commodi-

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ties and attitudes kindled a reactionary fire. Paradoxically, Buruma and Margalit point out, there was here the shadow of still another Western idea of ancient provenance: the big city as Babylon. And with it came a further paradox: the importation of such originally Western bogeymen as Jews and Freemasons, taken to be the devilish, "cosmopolitan" managers and conspirators advancing the Occidental conquest.

Capitalism, too, became a target of Eastern animosity, especially in the form of the bourgeois satisfaction with money and the comfort it can buy. To this were opposed the heroic virtues, the ideals of self-sacrifice, and the religious and aristocratic visions of grandeur that each afflicted society associated with its own past. Liberalism and democracy were no less frequently rejected as symptoms of the same disease, along with artistic freedom and sexual license. Hence, in much of the Third World, the appeal of socialism with its promise of a purely "scientific" way to obtain the advantages of modernity without the cultural and religious ramifications. But then, with the failure of socialism to deliver the goods, resentment was added to an already combustible inferiority complex to fuel still further animosity to the West.

Buruma and Margalit discern something novel in the specifically Islamist condemnation of the West, which looks upon the Westerner neither as someone to ignore nor as someone to win over but, in religious terms, as an idolater to be slain. And yet, when Islamists try to define the nature of Western idolatry, they too yield to the same anti-urban, anti-bourgeois, and Manichaean impulses that they share with all other Occidentalists. Mao drove the urban proletariat out to work in rural communes, and the Khmer Rouge emptied Phnom Penh; both were inspired by approximately the same set of objections that provoked the Taliban to strafe Kabul.

What the Occidentalists in each place and time have shared, according to Buruma and Margalit, is a failure to grasp the indivisibility of human advancement. "You cannot import what is merely utilitarian while keeping out the potentially subversive ideas that go with it." (Alas, what you *can* do is try.) But this is not to say that the authors absolve the West of blame. To the contrary, they are eager to concede that people who attribute all their problems to (for example) American foreign policy have some valid points. Nor are they against anti-Westernism *per se*; they are just against taking it to the point where it thoroughly dehumanizes the Other. Criticism of "globalization" is one thing, but by the time a whole Western society has been reduced to "a mass of soulless, decadent, money-grubbing, rootless, faithless, unfeeling parasites," things have gone too far.

WHAT CAN one say about these various exercises in cross-cultural analysis? Though Said on the one hand and Buruma and Margalit on the other share a common or converging theme, their books proceed differently and strike very different tones. (*Occidentalism*, for instance, is much less overtly polemical than *Orientalism*.) But each of them is deeply unsatisfactory.

While Said's *Orientalism* had its incidental merits, many of its defining flaws were pointed out early on by scholarly critics. In particular, it was indefensibly selective, tendentious, and reckless with fact. It also played shamelessly to the political gallery, uncritically flattering the radical mentality of the 1970's. Choosing colorful—and generally unrepresentative—examples to serve his argument, Said entirely overlooked almost all of the most serious and accomplished Orientalists, including the prominent Muslim ones. He showed himself entirely unaware of scholarly publishing in the Arab world itself, and of previous Arabic discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of Western scholarship.

The intellectual deception in *Orientalism* was, in fact, thoroughgoing. By restricting his field to a small sampling of Anglo-Saxons and Frenchmen (plus some gratuitously introduced Israelis), Said managed to exclude the German contribution that *dominated* Western Orientalism through both of the centuries he surveyed, and without which the scholarly tradition as a whole is incomprehensible. Likewise he ignored significant Dutch, Italian, Austrian, Hungarian, and other scholars—for the obvious reason that their countries had no horses in the race to occupy the collapsing Ottoman Empire. Seeking no enemies on the Left, he also sedulously bypassed the Soviet Russian Oriental School—which would have supplied a true rogues' gallery for comparison with the Europeans. For, in the service of Marxist ideology, the Russians peppered their studies with extremely insulting and dismissive remarks about Islamic religion and "feudal" Arab society.

Worse, as Bernard Lewis, Malcolm Kerr, and others pointed out, much of the historical narrative that underlay Said's book was downright ignorant. He got important events in the wrong order, and he hung his thesis on a historical model, borrowed from the French scholar Raymond Schwab, that corresponded to Anglo-French adventures in India but predated the Anglo-French forays into the old

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Ottoman dominions of the Near East by more than a century. Indeed, as Lewis discovered, the whole book amounted to a Procrustean transplantation of Schwab's work on sub-continental India to another region entirely.

Ignorant and meretricious though it was, *Orientalism* wrought lasting damage. Whereas Said had (largely though not entirely) confined his application of the word "Orientalism" to Western apprehensions of the Near East, his intellectual descendants quickly freed themselves of any such limitation, using his one-string harp to generalize about Western encounters with the whole planet. And whereas Said had allowed that the word "Orientalism" might retain its old meanings in parallel with his new, his successors abandoned both variety and ambiguity. All Western efforts to understand non-Western cultures and aspirations could be tarred with the same brush.

Nor could Said be altogether excused of responsibility for the wild generality of his followers; he had suggested it from the beginning. Orientalism was, for him, something only Western people could do, and only to Eastern people, and in *Orientalism* and even more so in his later writings he was promiscuous in pointing to examples of "Orientalist" bias operating beyond the Arab world. Thereafter, the imbalance of power between East and West over the last few centuries was made quite consciously a point of departure for a vast harvesting of easy examples of the "othering" of anything not free, white, and male.

In the end, the most telling thing about Said's *Orientalism* is that while it has became a standard textbook, not to say a classic, throughout the English-speaking West, it has been almost completely ignored in the Arab world—except by Western-educated Islamists, who have gladly seized upon it for their propaganda. Indeed, the most positive Arab response to Said is a nearly 900-page examination of the subject by the Egyptian Islamist thinker Hassan Hanafi, published in Cairo in 1992 under the title *Introduction to the Science of Occidentalism*. It argues for a distinctively Islamic study of the modern West, for the express purpose of "othering" it into extinction. It is not available in English, and probably would not be worth reading if it were.

Unlike *Orientalism*, Buruma and Margalit's *Occidentalism* does not pretend to be a work of scholarship or of literary sleuthing. It is also less a piece of sustained argumentation than a scrapbook—an anecdotal tour of several of history's oft-visited mental asylums, the rather hapless conclusion of which is that many of the inmates are crazy. The superficiality itself becomes a grievous intellectual flaw.

To begin with, by offering us a long catalogue of now-defunct enemies of Western civilization—Muscovite pan-Slavist dreamers, German race theorists and hero worshippers, Japanese emperor-cultists, Stalinist, Maoist, and other utopian butchers, chauvinists of various kinds and degrees—Buruma and Margalit create the effect of extenuating the Muslim jihadists who threaten us today, and of diminishing their importance in the grand scheme of things. *All* such enemies, they write somewhat resignedly, tend to characterize us in much the same way. We—the Westerners, the Europeans, the Americans, the bourgeois, the cosmopolitans, the Jews, whoever—are whores; our civilization is Babylon.

But what does this reveal, aside from their implacable hatred of us? And what is there about this hatred that we could ever reason with? Well, it is "bad ideas," according to Buruma and Margalit, that provide the family resemblance between one anti-Western fantasy and another, and bad ideas can presumably be countered by good ones. Unfortunately, what they have presented is a collection less of ideas than of caricatures, and what unites them is only that they are caricatures of the same thing—that is, the same Western civilization, which has itself undergone a crisis of modernity yet shows certain continuing traits. It is the civilization that has prevailed, and has been seen to have prevailed, over every other on earth. So why would it *not* be despised by the "others," and why would not some of those others carry their grudge beyond despising?

In any case, what really holds the authors' various schools of Occidentalism together is not ideas but, rather, a history of failure and maladaptation. These are people driven by an acute sense of inferiority, by humiliation; they bury a painful reality under sheets of fantasy. They do not seek dialogue with us, but revenge. And they cannot exact revenge except with the West's own technology. To the extent that we try to excuse them, or argue with them, we misunderstand them. For only the mad argue with the mad; it is the task of the sane to restrain them.

On the other hand, we do a terrible disservice not only to our own mental health but to the sane trapped among our enemies by failing to defend ourselves, intellectually as well as militarily. Yet nowhere in Buruma and Margalit will the reader find anything resembling a vindication of the West's merits. Instead, there are repeated admissions that, of course, we are not perfect, and America and Israel have many flaws. What this suggests is that Buruma and Margalit are not addressing the

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Occidentalists after all but rather a purely Western audience accustomed to the same parlor game that Edward Said was playing.

Their final prescription, which gives that game away, is unbelievably limp, and has to be read to be believed:

> The story we have told in this book is . . . a tale of cross-contamination, the spread of bad ideas. This could happen to us now, if we fall for the temptation to fight fire with fire, Islamism with our own forms of intolerance. Religious authority, especially in the United States, is already having a dangerous influence on political governance. We cannot afford to close our societies as a defense against those who have closed theirs. For then we would all become Occidentalists, and there would be nothing left to defend.

In other words: the fault, dear brutes, lies in ourselves.

NOT UNTIL the penultimate chapter of *Occidentalism* do Buruma and Margalit delve specifically into Islamist ideology. Here is where they draw their distinction between secular and religious ideologies—a largely specious distinction, in my view, since the spiritualization of politics is an inevitable concomitant of ideologizing. Here, too, they make the characteristic liberal error of missing the continuities in the Wahhabi response to modernism over the course of more than two centuries—not to mention the tension between "catholic" and "puritanical" manifestations of Islam that runs deeper still, back to the Muslim middle ages. Intent on finding common intellectual sources, they cannot see that the present confrontation between Muslim East and post-Christian West may be more fundamental, and thus likely to be much longer-lasting, than our other confrontations.

What makes Islamism different from the other Occidentalisms? It is its very rootedness, the fact that it can strike chords much deeper in Islamic history than the experience with modernity. The usual contrasted pairing of "Europe" with "Islam"—a geographical term with a religious one—obscures this from us.

Through many centuries, the Muslims who surrounded Europe's Christians posed the chief threat to Christian religious and cultural identity; for Muslims, the Christians both outside and inside the realm of Islam were the chief threat to *them*. Each knew the other as its rival in the evangelization of the world. No other religions (since Buddhism in the age of Asoka) had made such universal claims to the allegiance of men as were made by both Islam and Christianity. No two peoples could use the word "infidel" to describe each other with such mutual understanding of its meaning.

They did not, however, create each other. The claims of Said's French structuralists notwithstanding, each civilization created itself, not by an "othering" process but by building upon its own traditions, its own legacy of faith. At one point, when the Christians discovered themselves to be completely surrounded by Muslims, the Christians became self-consciously aware of Islamic civilization. At a later point—the colonial situation—the Muslims discovered themselves to be completely surrounded by Christians. It is the same Christian West that today continues to surround them, and interpenetrate them, and fill them with a self-conscious fear of annihilation.

It is necessary to grasp this in order to balance the lazy, secular Western tendency to lump radical Islam together with sundry fascist and totalitarian movements more comprehensible to us because they happen to use a more European vocabulary. The rivalry between *this* West and *that* East—between the West and Islam—is different in kind from the rivalries between either of us and any other civilization. Even though the West, especially Europe, has become outwardly de-Christianized, it retains so many of the characteristics and moral assumptions, and so much of the worldview, of the Christendom that underlies it that it continues to *be* Christendom from any external point of view. In this sense, the Muslims understand us better than we understand ourselves.

They certainly understand us better than the purveyors of such fashionable jargon as Orientalism and Occidentalism. Beneath both accounts of "othering" lies the naive assumption that the West can be identified with modernity and even more specifically with the Enlightenment—prior to which, we might suppose, it was just a backward, third-world sort of culture like every other. But the West precedes the Enlightenment, and the ideals of the Enlightenment could only grow out of a much longer history.

In the depths of that history lie the roots of the peculiar Western ideas of law, of impersonal institutions, of separation of church and state, of the significance of the individual, of the voluntary nature of community, and of many other factors contributing to the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment's rationalist commitments owe even more to Thomas Aquinas than to Voltaire; its spiritual flavor is dis-

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cernible in Augustine. Even the ideas that exploded in the Paris of 1789 were present in the Paris of 1277, and may be found listed among the 219 theses condemned in that year by Bishop Tempier.

This is why it is possible to speak without self-contradiction of Christian humanism—even of Calvinist humanism—and why it is an error to conceive of the Enlightenment and all that followed it as a complete breach with Christian history. The Reformation, the Enlightenment, humanism: Christianity could accommodate these things because these things were implicit in it. By the same token, however, the phrase "Islamic humanism," though a conjunction devoutly to be wished, is in fact a contradiction in terms; as a goal, it has repeatedly eluded those down through the ages, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, who have dreamed of it.

The great accomplishments of the Islamic past were not built on humanist ideas. Though the medieval Arabs took over various Greek traditions in science and philosophy, they absolutely rejected Greek art and literature, with their representations of the divine-in-man (in theory, a representation perfectly congenial to a Christian). Islam could not have a reformation or an enlightenment or a genuine humanism because such things were not only missing from Islam but explicitly repudiated by it. This is not to say that Islam's accomplishments were necessarily inferior to the West's; they were, instead, radically "other."

In the later 19th century, there were many Islamic liberals at work, merrily importing all sorts of "discoveries" from the West. What happened to them? They died right out. We may applaud those who today are trying against all odds to resurrect that noble project. But we should also acknowledge how great, if not insurmountable, the odds really are.

Does an honest recognition of radical otherness preclude the ability to understand "the Other"? To the contrary, it may be the precondition for such an understanding.

Take the proposition that to study "the Other" is necessarily to distort and disfigure it, and that anyone engaged in such an enterprise must tend to be in the service of his own culture's political and ideological assumptions. Thus stated, the proposition sounds plausible enough (if also untestable). But so long as cultures are bound to interact on the finite surface of this planet, it does not get us anywhere. From the time the world began, the human tribes have been appropriating, and improving upon, each other's cultural and even political productions, on the principle of "who can, may." The East may be understood on Western terms or on Eastern terms; the West, likewise. Civilizational rivalry does not preclude this effort; indeed, it may spur it on.

For me, one of the most fascinating and indeed inspiring writers on Islam in English is Fazlur Rahman, whose heartfelt, one-volume survey, *Islam* (1979), may well be the best place for a curious reader to begin learning about Islam's experience of modernity from within. The son of a learned *alim* (scholar) in the northwest frontier of Pakistan, Rahman was educated initially in *madrassas* before finishing his university education in Lahore with distinction in Arabic. He then went to Oxford, where he wrote a remarkable dissertation on the medieval Arab philosopher Avicenna, and later taught the Islamic metaphysical tradition at Durham (England), McGill, UCLA, and finally Chicago. He was recalled to Pakistan in the 1960's to run the Central Institute of Islamic Research, tasked with recommending national legal and political reforms. There, colliding with both the *ulama* and the bureaucracy, he acquired the experience with which he later struggled intellectually for a way to overcome the ossification of Islamic education and society.

I mention Rahman because he writes out of the same metaphysical tradition that he studied and taught, his mind trained in "Eastern" categories that prove wonderfully useful in receiving and interpreting modern "Western" ideas. His fundamental distinction between "historical Islam" and "normative Islam"—an attempt to abstract the universal message of Islam from the historical circumstances in which the Qur'an appeared, without sacrificing the divine nature of the text itself—was founded on the best traditions of the medieval Islamic philosophical schools. And yet how did Rahman gain access to that tradition? Largely, through the Orientalist institutions of the West, which had preserved a treasury of medieval Arab thought to return to later generations of Muslims just as the Muslims once preserved a treasury of Greek thought to return to us.

How does the case of Rahman fit into the scheme of Edward Said, or for that matter into the inverted scheme of Buruma and Margalit? It does not and cannot. How, moreover, do we explain the leap of serious Muslim thought into the clothing of the English language—the language that served Said and Rahman alike as Arabic once served Jewish and Christian thinkers, or as Muslim thought was once translated into Persian and Turkish and Hindi and Malay?

In the case of this one man—and there have been many others, including especially Iranians—we can see the whole project of cultural reductionism begin-

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ning to implode. If a Fazlur Rahman has something to say to me as a Westerner, and incidentally as a Christian, can I doubt that a Gibb, or a Massignon, or a Lewis, has something to say that would be of equal interest to an intelligent and believing Muslim?

For a better comprehension of what is at stake in the current exchange between East and West, I turn to another public intellectual of today, Lee Harris, whose new book, *Civilization and Its Enemies*,* begins and ends by evoking the majestic example of the 14th-century Muslim historian ibn Khaldun, the inventor and perhaps greatest master of the discipline we now call sociology. Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah*, or "Prolegomenon" to the study of history, was an unprecedented effort to comprehend the causes of the rise, persistence, and decline of human civilizations.

Ibn Khaldun considered the primary cause of civilizational decline to be forgetfulness. As Harris explains, this could be defined as the "tendency of civilized men to take for granted the complex and peculiar historical conditions that permitted them to behave as civilized men." It is a collective amnesia, a forgetting of who we are, and of how we came to be, and therefore of what we must do to continue being.

This is the very crisis that threatens to undermine and finally destroy everything in the West that has been worth emulating by foreign cultures. In the East itself, the situation may well be past the crisis point, for the conditions that raised Islamic civilization to the heights it once attained seem to be irretrievably lost, leaving us "others" in the unhappy position where we may only be able to learn from the Islamic past.

IT IS in the nature of civilizations to civilize. It is also in their nature to learn, as the Romans learned from the Greeks, the Christians from the Romans, Greeks, and Jews, the Muslims from the Christians, Jews, and Greeks. And it is in the nature of successful civilizations, as Hegel wrote, to transcend their teachers, and in turn to become teachers themselves, raising up from barbarism the untutored world around them—or else falling back into barbarism themselves as they forget what they are.

The rise of the West has been a case of Darwinism on a world-historical scale: a triumph of adaptation in which the Western way of doing things has proved to work better than any other way. This is not to suggest that our civilization is the end of history, that it has nothing to learn, or even that it is not in decline. We have prevailed, as previous civilizations prevailed, because we believe in work instead of djinns, and hold fast to the law of noncontradiction. That, after all, was how the Muslims advanced themselves many centuries ago.

It is, however, incumbent upon us to say so. It is incumbent upon us to correct fanciful errors: to explain, in this case, that the West did not prevail over the East because it was peculiarly brutal or conspiring or malicious but rather because it was unusually adept, co-operative, and just. We sufficiently mastered the realities of the world around us to remain in charge of our destiny.

The "Orientalist" project was very much a part of this enterprise. This was not, as Edward Said infers, an unconscious, Freudian, concealed agenda; the Orientalists were fully conscious of it. Their very ability to master exotic languages, and reconstruct lost literatures and histories, and analyze them in an empathetic yet objective way was the mark of their cultural confidence, as also of their accomplishment. For despite frequent flaws in procedure, motive, sentiment, and imagination, the European and American Orientalists of the 19th and 20th centuries did a spectacular job of exploring and interpreting Said's Near East—better, in aggregate, than even the brilliant attempts of ibn Khaldun to explain, reciprocally, the functioning of the European courts to Arabic readers.

The Orientalists felt themselves part of a West so triumphant that they had become heirs to the entire cultural inheritance of the world. Conversely, the symptoms of our own forgetful decline may well be found in the reflexive multiculturalism that has banned such triumphalism from our thinking about ourselves, while leaving large numbers of us unable to make any cultural demands of "others," no matter how psychopathological or destructive their behavior. This refusal to demand cultural change, a refusal often advanced in the name of liberal tolerance and decency, is, in Harris's apt word, "indefensible." He spells out the point in curtly moral terms:

> It is to treat the members of this other culture as if they were children, and to condemn them to live in a kind of cultural wildlife preserve. To argue that other cultures cannot change because their members are incapable of embodying the values we hold dear is racism.

This is the kind of bald, rational, true, evangelical, and thoroughly Western statement that writers like Said, Buruma, and Margalit have long since lost the ability to utter. Tolerance and decency are part of the Western heritage, but they are not ends in themselves. There is so much more; and if we are to survive the present crisis of our civilization—and theirs—we had better remember to remember.

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Politics and the Israeli Novel

Hillel Halkin

"THERE IS no real role for politics in my novels," the Israeli author Amos Oz was quoted as saying in a December *New York Times* article about him, A.B. Yehoshua, and David Grossman, the reigning triumvirate of contemporary Israeli fiction. "I have never written a story," Oz continued, "in order to tell the Israelis to stop building settlements or to tell the government to stop putting pressure on the Palestinians. That is the realm of bad fiction."

In discussing the place of politics in the literary careers of Oz, Yehoshua, and Grossman—all three are active in the Israeli "peace movement" and were participants in the recent "Geneva Initiative"—the author of the *Times* article, Amy Wilentz, observed that Oz in particular is "adamant about the division between his fictional writing and his political work." But the same division is basic to all three. "Read [their] nonfiction, and you will find essayists and reporters profoundly involved with the political life of their times. Read their fiction, and it is like listening to the inner workings of anyone's heart." In interviews, Wilentz reported, all three "said that they suffered from the classic problem of writers in times of trouble, what could be called creative dissonance, in which fiction and nonfiction seem almost to come into conflict."

HILLEL HALKIN *is the author most recently of* Beyond the Sabbath River: In Search of a Lost Tribe of Israel. *A regular contributor to* COMMENTARY, *he is also a columnist for the* Jerusalem Post *and the* New York Sun. *A different version of the present essay was presented as a lecture at Harvard last October.*

David Grossman would delete the "almost." He told Wilentz:

> When a group of Israeli pilots refused to continue participating in missions in which Palestinian civilians were routinely killed, I felt so moved that I couldn't continue with my imaginary writing. And then you write an article [about it], and then there are many responses, and you have to respond to these responses, and then people talk to you in the street.

(Besides publishing an op-ed on the pilots' declaration last September, Grossman helped organize a writers' manifesto in their support. A second, more cautiously worded statement in their behalf was initiated and signed by Yehoshua and Oz.)

Oz summed up:

> In the Jewish tradition, [writers] are supposed to be the prophets who show the way and get stoned in the marketplace. . . . [But] when I am writing a novel, I myself have [no] politics. I am on everyone's side.

And yet while more politics in the novels of Oz, Yehoshua, and Grossman might or might not benefit their fiction, it would almost certainly be good for their politics. This is a point I shall return to.

THE ONLY "Jewish writer" on record to have been stoned by anyone is the prophet Zechariah the son of Yehoyada at the start of the 8th century B.C.E. Nevertheless, the "creative dissonance"

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spoken of by Wilentz, far from being uniquely associated with the stresses of contemporary Israeli life, has been present in modern Hebrew literature all along. Since its emergence in Eastern Europe in the mid-19th-century Haskalah, or Hebrew enlightenment, this literature has had politics thrust on it. As spokesmen for the Haskalah, its earliest writers constituted not only a literary movement but a lobby for social reform at a time when East European Jewry had no other leadership than its deeply conservative rabbinic establishment. Authors like Y.L. Gordon, Peretz Smolenskin, and Moshe Leib Lilienblum were forced to be political precisely because modern Jewish politics did not yet exist.

In this respect, early modern Hebrew literature performed a task that fell to the literatures of other European peoples, too, in the early stages of their struggle for political empowerment. But Hebrew authors remained politically in the forefront even after East European Jewry and its Zionist colony in Palestine developed political institutions. So inextricably linked were Hebrew literature and Zionism that their futures were mutually dependent. Only a culturally revolutionary Hebrew society in Palestine could create a Jewish state; only a Hebrew-speaking Jewish state could guarantee a place in which modern Hebrew authors would be read. For Diaspora writers who did not grow up speaking Hebrew, writing in the language was a political act by definition, and one they were expected by their readers to articulate.

Since artists tend to resist expectations as often as they obey them, however, this articulation often took indirect forms. Yosef Hayyim Brenner, for example, a major Hebrew novelist and short-story writer of the early 20th century, dealt with the conflict between his own sense of radical isolation and his belief in the politics of Jewish solidarity by replicating it in the lives of his characters: lonely protagonists who confront the comforts and complicities of community. The private lives of the characters of S.Y. Agnon, on the other hand, are often symbolic embodiments of public issues that they themselves are not conscious of representing.

Some Hebrew writers compartmentalized stylistically. Thus, the mid-20th-century poet Natan Alterman published a regular column of light-verse political commentary in the newspapers while setting a higher aesthetic bar for his more serious work elsewhere. And Hayyim Nahman Bialik, proclaimed the "national poet" of the Hebrew renaissance at a precociously young age, composed his bardic blank verse and his introspective lyrics of sadness, longing, cynicism, and revulsion with equal care, while keeping them apart by means of prosodies so distinct that they seem almost to be written by different hands.

Bialik, though he cultivated this dichotomy in his creative life, also resented it. There is a poem of his called "Evening," written in the characteristic quatrains of his lyrical mode, which begins with a vision of a splendid sunset and great building blocks of clouds changing shape on the horizon—whole worlds, in an image taken from the Midrash, being demiurgically "made and destroyed." But when the poet looks again, the sunset has faded into grayness and the universes under construction have vanished, leaving only "idiot evening scattering ashes on the earth." And the poet concludes, addressing the readers who have placed a laureate's wreath like a millstone around his neck:

> I have grubbed for your coins
> And lost my treasure—
> And Mephistopheles stands behind me and grins
> With a hideous pleasure.

Amos Oz could have been thinking of this poem when he told Amy Wilentz: "If I would sit at my desk and write a description of a beautiful sunset on a winter evening while people are dying ten miles from my home, I would feel like a traitor. But if, on the other hand, I use my storyteller's pen to write manifestoes in thin literary disguise, I will again feel like a traitor, to my art."

THE TUG-OF-WAR between these allegiances is, in short, a recurrent theme in the Hebrew literature of the last hundred years. One of the first aesthetically accomplished Hebrew novels, Mordecai Ze'ev Feierberg's *Whither*, published in 1898, tells the story of a private self strangled practically in the cradle. Its young hero, Hofni, grows up in a Ukrainian shtetl in the 1870's and 80's, the son of a sternly pietistic father who instills in him a fierce sense of Jewish duty; dreams as a boy and adolescent of bringing the messiah by his inward faith and devotion; is stricken by depression when this grandiose fantasy collapses; and recovers briefly as news of the new movement of Zionism reaches his village. "It was as if," we are told,

> a revolution in his being had made happiness of all his despair. . . . What need had there been for his madness, his isolation from life, when there was so much to do, so much new movement and light? If the Jewish people had

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> never forgotten its homeland in all its years of bitter exile, how could he, who fancied himself its general, have done such a thing?

Yet Hofni's "being" does not belong to him. The flurry of excitement over Zionism dies down, and his mental illness returns and results in an early death. As imaginatively developed as he is, Hofni has no self apart from the self he shares with his people, his despair for whom is despair of his own life.

A "GENERAL" of the Jewish people is, quite literally, what the boy born in 1939 who grew up to become Amos Oz fantasizes being in Oz's recent autobiographical account of his childhood and adolescence, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*.[1] Fighting Israel's 1948-49 War of Independence from his family's Jerusalem apartment, the nine-year-old Amos builds fortifications of blocks and pick-up sticks in the hallway, marshals armies of buttons on the living-room rug, fills his parents' bedroom with the forks and spoons of tanks and armored cars, and runs a communication wire from the bathroom to command headquarters in a closet by the front door. As the commander of his troops, he runs from room to room directing their movements.

Any small boy might play war games like these when his country is fighting on real battlefields. But the young Amos, the son of a bookishly intellectual and fervently Zionist father and a depressed and emotionally stifled mother who longs in hot, dusty Jerusalem for the green meadows, white snows, and chivalrous manners of her native Poland, has a precocious sense of identification with, and responsibility toward, not only his parents but the entire Jewish people. In a striking episode, he visits, during the last days of the British Mandate, the home of a wealthy Arab family; strays into its garden, where he encounters the family's daughter, a girl slightly older than himself; climbs a tree on a dare from her; and, swinging heroically from its branches and emitting Tarzan-like whoops, thinks, a moment before disastrously knocking over a heavy weight that maims the girl's baby brother below:

> Why, for sixty generations . . . the world has regarded us as a pitiful people of stoop-shouldered yeshiva students, frail moths afraid of our shadows, children of death, as the Arabs called us—and now a new, muscular Jew has appeared, a young Hebrew full of life whose lion-like roar shakes the world.

And the grown author of *A Tale of Love and Darkness* looks back ruefully on the "nine-year-old Zionist propagandist" that he was, actually a pale, skinny Jerusalem boy as bookish as his father, and remarks: "And yet, instead of the new Hebrew approaching the noble Arab, . . . couldn't I just have been a little boy with a young girl? Was that too much to ask?"

Those familiar with Oz's fiction will detect here the biographical genesis of a motif. Over and over again in Oz's novels, a protagonist feels trapped or constrained by a public self that is not of his choosing. Like Yonatan Lifshitz in *A Perfect Peace* (1982), who "at twenty-six . . . found himself longing to be alone at last, entirely alone, to find for himself what it was all about," Oz's characters yearn to cast off an identity imposed on them by the collectivism of the new Jewish state, with its youth movements, its kibbutzim, its army service, its ideological enthusiasms and quarrels, its hourly news bulletins listened to by an entire nation. Like Yonatan's, their lives seem to pass "in a clamorous, smoke-filled room where a tedious argument about some bizarre matter drags endlessly on"—an argument, so Yonatan tells himself, that he has no interest in.

Yonatan, a kibbutznik, feels that "real life" must be elsewhere. So, in Oz's *To Know a Woman* (1989), does Yoel Ravid, a Holocaust survivor and ex-Mossad operative who has the "vague sense that nothing is awake" and says to himself, when his old boss seeks to recall him from retirement by playing on his Jewish patriotism, "he and they will not be satisfied with less than my whole life, with everybody's whole life . . . and I'm not giving them that." So does the dying Alec Gideon in *Black Box* (1987), writing to his estranged wife that redemption through political activity is "the annihilation of the self. What is the obsession with redemption? Only a mask for a complete absence of the basic talent for life." So does Ruth Kipnis, a Palestinian-Jewish Madame Bovary and the mother of the boy Hillel in Oz's early novella *The Hill of Evil Counsel* (1976), the only one of his characters actually to elope with "real life," since she deserts her husband and son in a Jerusalem soon to be besieged by the Arab Legion and runs off to exotic climes with a British officer.

The actual story of the woman on whom Ruth Kipnis was modeled, Amos Oz's mother, Fanya Klausner, is told in full for the first time in *A Tale of Love and Darkness*. That story ended differently, with Fanya's suicide in 1951. In comparing these two different versions of how a young boy lost his mother, each featuring some of Oz's best writing,

[1] The Hebrew version came out in 2002. The book will be published in English this autumn by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

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one must take into account his preemptive attack in his autobiography on those readers and critics who look for "the gossip [of] what happened to you in real life as opposed to what you jazzed up in your fiction." Yet since few novelists choose, at the age of sixty, to write 600 pages about their "real lives," this protest remains disingenuous.

By Oz's decision, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, which deals frontally with an upbringing previously inferable only from his stories and novels, now forms with these a case study in how fiction simultaneously distills and deflects the realities that engender it. Perhaps, in the fantasies of the adolescent Amos-Hillel, there was an alternative version of his mother's life in which suicide was a family cover story for an even more shameful romantic escape; perhaps, for the real Fanya Klausner, death was the only eligible romantic partner. One way or another, however, attempted flight—from an oppressive environment, from a routinized life, from the public to the private self—is the subject of much of Oz's fiction.

This public self is not just the one constructed in response to the claims of Jewish peoplehood and statehood, though Oz's formative years in the 1940's and 50's did coincide with a time when such claims were intense and eagerly responded to by Israeli youth. It is, as well, the self of family, friendship, social obligation, and career. But the demands of peoplehood are always present in Oz's work, as they are in Bialik's and Feierberg's and Brenner's and Alterman's and Agnon's and dozens of other modern Hebrew writers. And the tension between them and the private self's need for recognition is central to Oz's writing, as it continues to be central to the life of Israel—a country that goes on demanding greater sacrifices of its citizens than does any other Western democracy, yet that has been deeply affected, like every Western democracy, by the contemporary privileging of the private life and its fulfillments.

Amos Oz's fictional strategy, like Brenner's three-quarters of a century before him, has been to express this tension as an awareness, sometimes dim and sometimes acute, in the minds of his characters. While the latter rarely have strong political views—Oz has saved these, as he told the *Times*, for his journalism—they feel the grip of politics and history on their lives and struggle to shake it off.

The fiction of Oz's contemporary A.B. Yehoshua, on the other hand, adopts an Agnonian strategy. Yehoshua's characters are even less politically aware than Oz's, since they lack the fear of politics as a predator that feeds on their lives. But they are also the focus of larger themes that crystallize around them even as they go unnoticed.

Yehoshua's latest novel, *The Liberated Bride*,[2] is typical in this respect. On the face of it, its main plot, having to do with an Israeli family from Haifa and its former in-laws in Jerusalem, is far removed from the public domain. The parents in this family, the middle-aged Yochanan and Hagit Rivlin, he a professor of Middle East history and she a district judge, have two sons—the younger in the army, the older, Ofer, a divorcé living in Paris. Ofer's ex-wife, Galya, with whom he is still tormentedly in love, has remarried and is pregnant with her first child; her father, the owner of a small Jerusalem hotel, has just died, leaving the running of it to her older sister Tehila—who, we gradually learn, has had an incestuous relationship with him. It was Ofer's discovery of this relationship that caused his break-up with Galya when she refused to believe it. But Ofer's parents do not know this secret or understand why their son's marriage has failed—and while Hagit, the judge, is temperamentally content to make do with the evidence presented to her, her husband the historian, much to her disapproval, is obsessed with unearthing the full truth, which alone, he believes, can free his son of the ghosts of the past. The family conflicts to which this leads form one axis of *The Liberated Bride*.

Not exactly the stuff of a political novel. But there is a subplot, too. This involves one of Yochanan Rivlin's students, a young Israeli Arab woman unable to graduate because she owes Rivlin an unfinished paper. Trying to coax a "complete" out of him, she invites him to her wedding and cajoles him to visit her village and family. There he meets a cousin of hers, who enlists him in an attempt to obtain an Israeli residence permit for a sister living in the Palestinian Authority—an attempt that ends tragically when, the permit denied, the sister's son is killed trying to cross illegally into Israel.

Here, at least, there would seem to be political potential. Yet if Yehoshua is exploring in this subplot the ways in which manipulations of Arab and Jewish identity affect a teacher-student relationship, or the deadly effect of Israeli rule over the Palestinians, what does this have to do with the main plot? It is possible to read the whole of *The Liberated Bride* as no more than a darkly comic account of an intellectually hyperactive scholar who, thinking he must get to the bottom of everything

[2] The Hebrew original appeared in 2001. The English translation (by me) was brought out in this country last autumn by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 576 pp., $27.00.

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and find a solution for all problems, embroils himself and others in a series of predicaments.

As always in Yehoshua's work, however, one must look for a second, submerged novel beneath the first one. The clue to this underground structure is the theme of borders, which repeatedly crops up in *The Liberated Bride*. Just as the absence of clear borders between Israel and the occupied territories leads to the death of an Arab boy, so it permits the incest between Tehila and her father; causes Rivlin to interfere in his son's life, nearly destroying their relationship and straining his ties with his wife; entangles him in dealings with an Arab student and her family that compromise his professional standing; and above all, brutally prolongs the territorial war between Israel and the Palestinians, two people who have been unable to draw a boundary between them. Boundaries, once you begin to look for them, are missing everywhere in *The Liberated Bride*—even in a Palestinian Authority-sponsored evening of poetry attended by Rivlin and his wife, at which are read the verses of Islamic mystics describing the union of soul with soul and of soul with God, thus erasing the most fundamental distinctions of all.

It is Hagit Rivlin, the district judge entrusted with enforcing boundaries, and their levelheaded defender, who is the real hero of *The Liberated Bride*. The relationship between her and her husband, loving even when combative, occupies the best pages of the novel—in which, as often in Yehoshua, one is sometimes distracted by the clank of off-stage machinery lifting and lowering symbolic scenes into place. Hagit speaks politically for Yehoshua, whose own position has long been that borderlessness—physical, intellectual, juridical, and metaphorical—is responsible for the problems of Israel and the Jewish people.

A radical, "Diaspora-negating" Zionist, Yehoshua has written a nonfiction book, *The Right to Normalcy* (1980), calling for unambiguous demarcations between Israel and world Jewry and between Judaism and Jewishness. Elsewhere he has analyzed anti-Semitism as a phobic reaction to the Jews' amorphous nature, which allows them to be both a religion and a nationality, staunchly territorial and at home everywhere, the most passionate of universalists and the most stubborn of particularists. Although the Rivlins and others in *The Liberated Bride* do not consciously reflect on such themes, they are the medium through which they are refracted. The political is not opposed by Yehoshua to the personal, as it is by Amos Oz, but is rather subsumed in it—the public, in a reversal of the usual order of things, hidden inside the private, the outer inside the inner.

David Grossman has dealt with his "creative dissonance" by following the model of Alterman. Indeed, he has gone well beyond it to an almost Manichean duality.

Grossman, born in 1954, belongs to the literary generation that followed Yehoshua and Oz's, and the defining political event of his childhood was the 1967 rather than the 1948 war. His first novel, *The Smile of the Lamb* (1983), dealt with the consequences of this war and of Israeli rule in the occupied territories. Two of its four main characters are friends and army officers, a lieutenant and a major responsible for the administration of an occupied West Bank town; the other two are an elderly Palestinian whose son has been killed by Israeli soldiers and the lieutenant's wife, who is also the major's lover. Although neither officer is blind to the injustices of the occupation, their attitudes toward it differ, the lieutenant convinced it is an evil that must be ended, the tougher-minded major believing it can—like his adultery with his friend's wife—be ridden out. In the end both men, the cynic and the idealist, die together, killed by the Palestinian, an eccentric storyteller more innocent yet more cunning than either of them.

The Smile of the Lamb is an absorbing but flawed novel, its moral too obvious, its juxtaposition of the public and the private, the self-deceptions of the occupation and of an adulterous marriage, too symmetrical. Although it was well-received by the critics, Grossman, a writer of great ambition and talent, chose in his subsequent books to separate the political from the personal entirely. There have been nine of these so far. Three, *The Yellow Wind* (1987), *Sleeping on a Wire* (1992), and most recently *Death As a Way of Life*[3] (2003) are works of political reportage and journalism, all centered on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The other six have been novels. Of these, the three major ones, *See Under: LOVE* (1986), *The Book of Intimate Grammar* (1991), and *Be My Knife* (1998)—the last recently released in English translation[4]—are attempts to tunnel ever deeper into private worlds.

Be My Knife employs that oldest of novelistic

[3] Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 192 pp., $22.00.

[4] Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 324 pp., $25.00. Even more recently published in English is Grossman's *Someone to Run With* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 352 pp., $24.00), a novel that—like his previous *The Zigzag Kid*—straddles the line between juvenile and adult fiction. An urban fairytale set in Jerusalem, it is, though delightfully written, more an entertainment than serious fiction.

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forms, the epistolary exchange. Except for a brief, final chapter, it comprises two sections, a longer one of letters written by a man named Ya'ir to a woman he has never met, and a shorter one of letters written by the woman, Miriam, to Ya'ir.

Ya'ir, a happily married man (or so he tells Miriam) and the father of a small boy, has seen Miriam only once, at a class reunion to which she accompanied her husband. Attracted to her on sight, he decides that she is the woman for an experiment he wishes to try, namely, to create between two people an honesty and intimacy so great that each will undergo, as he writes to her, "a complete entering into the other . . . in order to experience, just once, a stranger, I mean, another in you." This merger of two beings is to be achieved by words alone. A sexual relationship, even a face-to-face meeting, is ruled out, because, as Ya'ir puts it platonically, "bodies are, after all, only a coincidence . . . just a few chunks of meat that happen to be stuck together in one way and not in another."

Miriam, intrigued and flattered, accepts the challenge. "I imagine," she replies, "a storm, a volcanic eruption from your insides and mine, something sweeping and shaking, that exposes us, forces us to live in another skin (or even better than that—with no skin at all)." The two correspond (rather anachronistically, via handwritten snail mail) and fall in love. Just as Ya'ir planned, they are soon baring their romantic selves to each other as they have never done to their marriage partners, with whom they have settled into a domestic pattern of regularly uttered and permanently unutterable thoughts—and it is the unutterable that Ya'ir and Miriam now strive to put on paper. Had it been they, rather than the Rivlins in *The Liberated Bride*, attending the Palestinian Authority's evening of poetry, they would have recognized their project in the words of the medieval mystic Al-Hallaj:

> Your soul stirred into mine:
> Into clear water—wine.
> Who touches you, touches me,
> I am you in one we.

Yet while Ya'ir and Miriam's souls are exquisitely attuned to each other, the perfect union—which Miriam, to Ya'ir's growing distress, begins retrogradely to desire in the flesh—does not take place. By now we know a great deal about these souls and even something about the bodies they inhabit, which could be almost anywhere—in Jerusalem, where they are, but equally in Madrid, Milan, Stockholm, or Valparaiso, since this city, although it does not lack flowers, birds, seasons, weather, or other things useful for love's conceits, has no suicide bombers, no cabinet meetings, no politics, no newspapers, not even any news. Ya'ir, to judge from his prose, has been dosing himself heavily with Rilke, especially with *The Notebooks of Malte Laureds Brigge*. But whereas Malte wrests his hard-earned insights from a Paris whose streets he walks and absorbs every day in all their haunting beauty and degradation, Ya'ir, writing to Miriam from his desk, makes, in John Donne's words, of one little room an everywhere.

In *Be My Knife*, the flight into the private self goes so deep that it seeks to emerge, as it were, on that self's far, inner side—where, in battering down the interior wall of another self, it paradoxically surrenders every shred of the privacy it has fought to gain. If in the dynamics of consciousness as in those of physics, actions have their equal and opposite reactions, this novel is the ultimate reaction of the Hebrew writer to the burden of public selfhood. The personal and the political in Grossman's work have reached a state here of utter disassociation.

The short, final section of *Be My Knife* may tell us that this reaction has gone too far. In this section, which gives the novel its dialectical bite, Miriam receives a panicky phone call from Ya'ir. It is the first time she has spoken to him, and he tells her that his wife is away for the day. He has had a fight with his five-year-old son and has locked him out of the house in a freezing rain until he apologizes—something, however, that the boy stubbornly refuses to do. Miriam, shocked by the anger and rigidity of a man she has known until now only from his tender letters, tries to persuade him to abandon this battle of wills and let the boy in. When Ya'ir remains as stubborn as his son, she jumps into her car and drives to his home. There she finds him, "naked and blue from the cold," having quite insanely preferred to punish himself along with the child by stripping to the bone and joining him in the rain. The two are lying in a puddle of rainwater, "twisted," as she puts it, "at a horrible angle to each other like two bent nails."

Possibly, this is *Be My Knife*'s way of saying that, in divorcing itself from the world of daily obligation, routine, physicality, and even politics—for what is the inability to negotiate a settlement with a small child but political failure at its most elemental?—the preciously refined soul offered up by Ya'ir to Miriam has become unhinged. Balanced on only one leg, it can be knocked down by the slightest bump in reality, even one no bigger than a five-year-old.

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The declaration of the 27 pilots who refused last September to participate in air-force missions over the occupied territories was a bigger bump.

"We, writers and poets in Israel," began the manifesto that David Grossman was instrumental in formulating, "hereby express our support of the moral right of air-force pilots to refuse to rocket and bomb civilian population centers, even as part of the war against terror." In his own op-ed in the newspaper *Haaretz*, Grossman wrote:

> When a state orders its pilots to fire missiles at a car [in which terrorists are traveling] that has pedestrians around it, even if it does not deliberately seek to injure them, the act and its results are like those of a terrorist organization. . . . A country cannot carry out liquidations, murders, and executions without trials.

The pilots themselves, a tiny fraction of Israel's roster of active-duty and reserve flyers, did not address the argument that, although innocent deaths are often unavoidable in war, pinpoint "assassinations" of the enemy are the best possible way to minimize them. (Such attacks are, in fact, the diametrical opposite of terror, which is designed to maximize innocent deaths.) Nor did they suggest a better way of punishing terrorists operating from Palestinian territory. They left this to David Grossman, who thinks such terrorists should be apprehended and brought to trial.

In some cases, like that of the Tanzim leader Marwan Barghouti, this is what Israel has done. And yet, for a novelist, Grossman is surprisingly unimaginative here. What, after all, would have happened had Israel sought to arrest the Hamas arch-terrorist Saleh Shahadeh rather than stage the helicopter attack on his home that, in a much-criticized incident in July 2002, killed fifteen Palestinians besides him, including women and children? Ground troops, supported by armor and air cover, would have had to go deep into Gaza to make the arrest. They would have had to fight their way through crowded neighborhoods to reach their destination, at which they almost certainly would have arrived too late, their forewarned quarry having vanished. They would then have had to cordon off a wide area and search for Shahadeh from house to house, killing and being killed so as to capture him alive. Had he then been legally convicted, would this have saved innocent Palestinians lives, let alone Israeli ones? If a journalist writes about what has happened while a novelist imagines what might happen, Grossman indeed wrote his op-ed strictly as a journalist.

The Oz-Yehoshua statement on the pilots was more moderate. While supporting "the right and obligation of every soldier to refuse to carry out any flagrantly illegal order," it also spoke of "the right and obligation of the state of Israel to defend its citizens in, and only in, all legal ways," and "the right and obligation of the courts to determine the boundaries of what is legally permitted and forbidden in time of war."

Yet such a formula, too, is unrealistically abstract. Is it really possible to set legal standards that would have enabled a commanding officer to decide whether to rocket Shahadeh's home? Would one innocent person by Shahadeh's side have been enough to rule out such an attack? Two? And suppose—as appears to have been the case—that intelligence sources were unaware of any persons; should an attack still have been barred because—as *was* the case—this intelligence might have been faulty or collateral damage might have harmed—as it in fact did—innocent people in the street? And if Israel's courts laid down such guidelines, would it be possible to apply them in the minutes or even seconds that are all a commanding officer may have in which to make up his mind?

The point is not that Israel's campaign against terror does not need to be fought morally. It is rather that situations of war can be too fluid, fast-moving, ambiguous, or complex to be responded to on the basis of moral reasoning. One must react to them by moral *instinct*—and the instantaneous vector of judgments, values, emotions, experiences, and assumptions that compose such an instinct, and that determine whether a commander decides to send a pilot on a mission, or a pilot chooses to fire his ordnance, would no doubt be better grasped by a novel than by a legal brief.

Nor is this true only of situations of war. A serious novelist must surely believe that the simulations of fiction—which can adopt any perspective, follow any thought into the mind of its thinker, trace the branchings of any emotion—are the optimal medium for exploring the nuances of human behavior. Nothing else can put them under such close scrutiny.

It may seem obvious, as it did to the *Times*'s Amy Wilentz, why Oz, Yehoshua, and Grossman, each of whom has written extensively about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, have shied away from a direct treatment of that conflict in all but a few of their fictional works. (Besides Grossman's *The Smile of the Lamb*, one might point to Oz's *Black Box*, with its clumsily satirical portrait of the right-wing reli-

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gious nationalist Michael Sommo, and one or two of Yehoshua's early stories, such as "Facing The Forests" or "Early in the Summer of 1970.") None of them has been at his best when writing overtly political fiction, and all belong to a Hebrew literary tradition in which the harmful effect of politics on "pure" art has been feared and resisted. In all of modern Hebrew literature, indeed, there is not a single outstanding political novel.

And yet, while speaking from his place in this tradition, Amos Oz was wrong to remark that a political point of view in a novel necessarily results in "bad fiction." Dostoevsky's *The Devils*, Malraux's *The Human Condition*, D.H. Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent*: bad fiction? On the contrary, these are wonderful works of fiction precisely because the political element in them, far from having a coarsening effect, is itself enriched and expanded beyond the flatness of political advocacy by its contact with the novelistic imagination. Although Oz may feel that he cannot write well about anyone whose "side" he is not on, this is to confuse opinion with empathy. Dostoevsky, in *The Devils*, not only despises Peter Verkhovensky's revolutionary politics, he despises Peter, his own creation; yet such is his fascination with and understanding of Peter that he makes him a fictionally enthralling and even prophetic figure, the classic portrait of the Bolshevik apparatchik 50 years before its time.

"[These] Hebrew pilots, who are flesh of the flesh of the Israeli consensus and the jewel in its crown," David Grossman wrote in *Haaretz*, "have obliged us to look, if only for a moment, into the heart of darkness." But "the heart of darkness," itself the name of a great political novel, is not to be found in the journalistic facts of an "assassination" of a Palestinian terrorist. It is in the inner sinews of that terrorist; of those who back and support him; of those who stalk him in order to kill him; of the ways their lives intersect. To anyone doubting that a work of contemporary fiction can bring disparate lives together to cast light on the nature of political violence with a brilliance that no journalism can match, I recommend a novel like Robert Stone's *A Flag for Sunrise*, set in Central America.

IN SEPARATING or concealing their politics from their fiction, talented writers like Oz, Yehoshua, and Grossman may think they are protecting their fiction. In fact, they are protecting only their politics. It is the weaker side that needs protection—and each of these men is a stronger novelist than he is a political advocate. His name on a statement of support for the 27 pilots, or on the Geneva Initiative, means less than it would on a work of fiction about them.

A novel about the Geneva Initiative? It might not be a bad idea. A cabal of several dozen men and women meeting secretly in different capitals of the world to end a conflict whose solution has eluded their warring peoples for decades has dramatic, not to say comic, possibilities. It offers a wide choice of venues: Jerusalem, Amman, Geneva, London, New York. Of characters: Israeli and Palestinian politicians, academics, military men, intellectuals. Of motives: adventure, hope, despair, duty, frustration, ambition, the seductive glamor of high purpose, the thrill and flattery of making history.

Such a novel would not lack for fictional situations: friendships, enmities, alliances, arguments, intrigues, deceptions, manipulations, hidden contacts. Or for themes: idealism and innocence, elitism and accountability. Nor would there be any shortage of possible plot developments. Suppose the leader of one of the delegations was receiving covert instructions from the head of the government he was supposedly independent of; or that a member of the other was planning to found a political party that would use the agreement arrived at as an instrument to bring him to power?

But it is not a critic's job to tell Israel's leading novelists what their next book should be about, or that, rather than letting, as Amy Wilentz puts it, "reporters and conferences and signings of peace accords in foreign cities" keep them from writing their novels, they should write their novels about reporters and conferences and peace accords in foreign cities. It is enough to suggest that, when it comes to the tensions between politics and fiction, they might risk, as neither any of them nor Hebrew literature has often done, putting their politics to fiction's test. Getting an "A" from the *New York Times* is easy by comparison.

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Writing on the Brain

Joseph Epstein

I WAS recently asked what it takes to become a writer. Three things, I answered: first, one must cultivate incompetence at almost every other form of profitable work. This must be accompanied, second, by a haughty contempt for all the forms of work that one has established one cannot do. To these two must be joined, third, the nuttiness to believe that other people can be made to care about your opinions and views and be charmed by the way you state them. Incompetence, contempt, lunacy—once you have these in place, you are set to go.

But why bother writing at all? What would motivate anyone to take up what often turns out to be a life fraught with many obstacles and few palpable rewards? This vexing question has received a number of usually unsatisfactory answers. They include the notions that serious writers are divinely inspired; that they have a preternatural love of aesthetic order; that they are in relentless pursuit of the truth (as they understand it); and, on the somewhat less complimentary side, that they are ego-driven and therefore attention-craving beyond all reckoning.

On each of these points, thus far, we have chiefly had to take the word of writers themselves. Even Sigmund Freud, though he had many zany ideas about the *act* of writing, the most famous of them being sublimation, threw in his cards on the question of motivation: "Before the problem of the creative artist," Freud wrote in an essay on Dostoevsky, "analysis must, alas, lay down its arms."

Nor has science, serious science, weighed in heavily on the issue of creativity—at least not until now. A prescient person might have seen the change coming when, a few years ago, the air began to be filled with cliché-ridden talk about the different sides of the brain, and about which side is responsible for what. Such as this:

> The left [side] seems to have the more important role in logical or sequential thinking, while the right [side] is somewhat more significant for spatial and emotional thinking, musical appreciation, and visual imagery. The specializations of the two hemispheres are relative, however, not absolute.

That particular passage, complete with its characteristic qualifications, comes from a recent book, *The Midnight Disease*, by Alice W. Flaherty.* A neurologist at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston and a teacher at the Harvard Medical School, Dr. Flaherty here tries to cover three related pieces of territory. She surveys, first, what has been written about the origin of the drive to write. Then she asks what causes writer's block, that dread "nightmare" of all writers. And finally she meditates on the factors that make for literary cre-

JOSEPH EPSTEIN *is the author of, most recently,* Envy *(Oxford) and a collection of stories,* Fabulous Small Jews *(Houghton Mifflin). He is working on a book about friendship.*

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ativity, stopping along the way to inquire into the origin and function of metaphor, the question of inspiration, and the relation between emotion and expression. Underlying the whole exercise is her conviction that "everything in our personalities, sick or well, comes from our brains—modified, of course, by experience."

Dr. Flaherty is an earnest and, more important, honest person. Thanks to her honesty, her inquiries into the effects of the brain on writing are more hedged about with the conditional tense and assorted qualifiers than a weather forecast for October 22, 2057. "May," "can," "seem," "could," "apparently," "appears," "perhaps," "probably," "relatively," "it is likely that," "lines of evidence point to," are words and phrases that turn up again and again in her sentences. It gives one a distinct feeling of oddness to come upon these elaborate hedgings in the presence of such weighty and exact terminology as "occipital cortex," "hypothalamus," "transcranial magnetic stimulations," "neuron transmitters," "hippocampus," "limbic systems," "amygdala," and the rest.

A standard passage in *The Midnight Disease* runs:

> But several higher-level visual areas in temporal and parietal cortex show increased activation, *even though* there is no visual stimulus. Some increased frontal cortex activation occurs, which *may* reflect multimodal sensory processing. (Emphasis added.)

What is it that Humphrey Bogart says of the character played by Elisha Cook in *The Maltese Falcon*? "The cheaper the gunsel, the gaudier the patter"?

THERE IS a reason for all this qualification. Neuroscience, in its current state, is less than dramatically impressive in the precision of its findings. Despite the high technology at its service, which makes possible various kinds of brain scans and imaging, a great deal is still in the realm of speculation, deduction, educated guessing. Paul McHugh, the Johns Hopkins psychiatrist and neurologist, has said that, so primitive is the contemporary study of the brain, it remains without its William Harvey, the physician who first mapped the circulatory system.

Much of what is known about the brain has been acquired through the study and correction of injuries: strokes, aphasias, tumors, and various sad jigeroos. Everyone has encountered such dirty tricks at work. I had a dentist who, after a stroke, lost his powers of recalling proper names or of following the simplest narratives. He killed himself. An acquaintance who suffers bipolar disease, considering shock therapy, was told that its exact effects could not be predicted; it was, the neurologist in charge added, like "restarting one's computer," which, as we all know, sometimes works wonders and sometimes is no help at all.

None of this is to suggest that the study of the brain is in any way fraudulent—phrenology with technology tacked on. But, because it has not found the major systems or forces that propel and operate the brain, neurology wants the satisfying rigor and precision that other divisions of medical science have long been able to count upon. Often able to tell what is wrong, it can only occasionally make things right. In its present state, it is most useful for psychopharmacology, for aiding in the teaching of elementary reading and writing, and especially for the treatment of dyslexia and other learning disabilities. Neurology is at its best when it describes how the body works in connection with the nervous system, as in the treatment of Parkinson's disease and epilepsy.

But neurology is at its worst when it attempts to explain how consciousness arises and how *it* works, how thought derives out of brain tissue—how, in other words, the brain produces the mind.The pretensions of neurology in this area need always to be carefully examined for extravagance. Early in her book, Dr. Flaherty asserts enthusiastically "that science can help us write." To adapt the Bill Clinton gambit, I would say that all depends on what you mean by "help," "us," and "write."

THE QUESTION that looms over *The Midnight Disease* is the extent to which writing, and the moods stemming from it, can be traced to brain abnormality. Sometimes Dr. Flaherty appears convinced that they can be. She concentrates on writers known to have had epilepsy, Dostoevsky and Flaubert notable among them. She confidently (and, in my opinion, crudely) diagnoses Henry James as "a unipolar depressive," and speculates about what might happen to J. D. Salinger's famous decades-long block if he took an anti-depressive like Paxil (how does she know that he is not already on it, and that it has not stopped him permanently from writing?). Quoting various experts on the question of literary motivation, she cites the belief of one of them, Hanna Segal, that (in Dr. Flaherty's paraphrase) "artistic creation is a response to the emptiness of depression." Even as she worries whether the tendency to treat writing as an "abnormal brain state" is a wise thing to do, or whether it does not amount to "pathologizing an activ-

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ity that should be praised," pathologizing, I fear, is what she finally does.

Certainly we have plenty of psychologically wounded writers: Dostoevsky, Melville, Baudelaire, Conrad. Then there are the drunks: Joyce, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dorothy Parker, and countless others. And let us not forget the dear drug addicts: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Thomas DeQuincey, William S. Burroughs, and the entire charmless Beat generation. At one point, Dr. Flaherty remarks that depression among writers is eight to ten times higher than among the general population. My own nonscientific response to this is that it makes very good sense, since there must be eight to ten times more people writing than there ought to be. These people, being in the wrong line of work, have earned their depression.

Dr. Flaherty writes from the standpoint of someone who has herself suffered depression. Along with regaling us with her own experiences as a writer—she has published one previous book, *The Massachusetts General Hospital Handbook of Neurology*—she tosses in her credentials as a former mental patient. She suffered post-partum depression after giving birth, at what one gathers was a fairly close interval, to two sets of twins (the first of whom were still-born), and required hospitalization. One of the results of her stay in the psychiatric ward—she does not say for how long—was manic hypergraphia, which is an unbounded energy and appetite for writing. Such was her happiness while scratching away that she seems to have felt the disease was much to be preferred to any cure.

While sometimes Dr. Flaherty makes writing seem a form of madness by other means, at others she makes it seem a matter of good intellectual hygiene. Thus, she traces much of the sad problem of writer's block—that is, the inability to produce words—to mood disorders of various intensities. Perfectionism, procrastination in its differing stripes, writer's cramp as a psychosomatic symptom, even lowered testosterone levels are brought into the discussion as possible reasons for writer's block, with mood-altering pills and psychotherapy being considered as the possible cure.

Dr. Flaherty's book is filled with standard quotations on writers' problems, including such matters as deadlines and their effect on productivity. A pity she does not appear to know the truth-laden aphorism of Karl Kraus, the Viennese wit: "a journalist, given time, writes worse." When it comes to blocks, most serious writers will tell you that the chief cause of the malady is a loss of confidence in one's ideas, or in the plan behind one's work. Here mood-altering pills and psychotherapy are unlikely to help. What a block means to a professional writer, at least one determined not to give way to neurotic caperings, is that he has not yet become smart enough to gain mastery over his subject.

That writing itself may be a neurotic act is an idea with a fairly short history; so, too, the contrasting notion that writing can be a way of dealing with and even overcoming neurosis. Better that both were ideas whose time had passed, but that is unlikely to happen soon. For her part, Dr. Flaherty appears to subscribe to the writers-are-essentially-performing-therapy-by-other-means school. That is hardly surprising. In an age that has seen the triumph of the therapeutic, writing, once regarded as an act of intellectual and artistic discovery, is now regularly extolled as an act of self-expressiveness, of working out one's mental and emotional problems. This is no doubt what prompts Dr. Flaherty to use her own experiences, both emotional and literary, to illustrate her points.

Alas, these experiences are a good deal less than convincing, and for one simple reason: the person telling us about them is less than a first-class writer. She belongs, rather, to the category of the cheerful amateur. "Reading the *New York Times Book Review* every week," Dr. Flaherty notes, "was a major part of my literary education"—a statement akin to claiming that one has learned how to fly by reading *Superman* comics. As a writer, not only does Dr. Flaherty use language in a loose and often dopey way, not only does she split infinitives with the easy exuberance of young Abe Lincoln splitting logs, but she provides no striking phrases or arresting metaphors, she over-dramatizes her own experience, lapses into cuteness and unconscious self-gratulation, and everywhere betrays many other marks of the amateur scribbler.

Something about *The Midnight Disease* suggests that it is written for other amateurs. If so, it may be the most dangerous how-to book in existence, offering all sorts of advice on anti-depressants, altering sleep cycles, changing the lighting in one's life, and other therapies to improve verbal flow. True, it also contains a warning from the author not to take any of the drugs mentioned except "under the supervision of a trained physician in the field." Or, as the old knife jugglers used to say, "Kids, don't try any of this at home."

My own early drive to write was, I think, fairly typical, but since it conforms to none of Flaherty's categories, I wonder how she would deal with it. As a young would-be writer, I har-

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bored no elevated notions of bringing truth or beauty into the world. Instead I wanted, ardently, to bring *me* into the world: to call me to its attention. My desire to write, which began when I was twenty, was never separable from wanting to write for print. In my own little behaviorist Skinner box, I pecked at the lever that, I hoped, would deliver small but delicious pellets of praise. Later on, my writing drive was also impelled by a sense that other writers were describing the world wrongly, and by the pleasure I took from exploring the richness of life and the mysteries of human character with such power as my acquisition of craft made available to me.

I have been lucky enough to scribble away at a fairly steady rate over many decades. Does this suggest that I suffer from what Dr. Flaherty calls hypergraphia, and what others used to call graphomania? Might I also have an enlarged temporal lobe, right side, that makes all this scribbling possible? Or an overactive limbic system, or hypothalamus, perhaps?

I do not believe any of these parts of my brain have diddly to do with it. Nor do I believe, as Dr. Flaherty seems to, in the debt that inspiration owes to the muses. (If a belief in muses sounds strange coming from the mouth of a neurologist, it ought to be noted that Dr. Flaherty manages to reconcile her devotion to science with her penchant for mysticism by reporting "evidence that the temporal lobe underlies mystical experience as well.") For the professional writer, at any rate, awaiting inspiration or the visit of a muse or the telltale twitch of the limbic system will produce no better results than waiting for Godot, who, when I last checked, had yet to show up. My allusion to Godot came, I believe, not straight from my intact temporal lobe but from my careful study of how metaphors work and sheer jolly cleverness.

But here is where Dr. Flaherty, like Dr. Freud before her, throws in *her* cards. "Science," she suggests, "is the mouthpiece of determinism, and literature the last holdout of free will." Safe to say that neuroscience these days holds brain chemistry and anatomy to be more decisive for human behavior and the formation of character than free will, whereas every serious writer will be firmly on the other side. Of course, whether neuroscience acknowledges even the existence of free will is another question, and one that Flaherty explicitly declines to adjudicate on behalf of neuroscience. Writers, of course, must come down on the side of free will. What, you might say, choice have we? Without free will there would be no literature in the first place: no drama, no insights into human nature, little, really, but the drab playing-out of the hands we have been dealt, with the aid of pills to bolster our lagging spirits. Artists are the natural opponents of determinism—which is why, for example, so many of them have mocked the heavily deterministic doctrines of Sigmund Freud.

ALTHOUGH IT has often been wrong and then corrected itself, modern science, alone of all human endeavors, has until now kept its promises. One wonders if its current promises—to reproduce life, to explain all behavior through brain anatomy and chemistry—might be so extravagant as to cost it some of its prestige. At least as it is set out in the pages of *The Midnight Disease*, neuroscience is distinctly unhelpful in explaining the mysteries that continue to surround literary creation—in connection both with the need to write and with the mechanisms that are at the heart of the act of writing.

The choice of writing as a living and a way of life is more complex than is likely to show up in a neurologist's PET scan. Nor, unlike in other artistic fields—music, the visual arts—does literary talent make such a life any easier by appearing early. "No Mozarts in literature," more than a well-known saying, is a fact. There are not too many Joseph Conrads, either, and Conrad published his first book when he was thirty-eight.

Nor, despite all the programs and creative-writing classes, can writing really be taught. In his "Dialogues on Art," Paul Valéry observes: "There are products of the mind that cannot be reduced to neat formulas of expression or systematic methods and practices." Writing happens to be one of them. One cannot teach a person to love language, to be smart, witty, have a dramatic sense, to be observant, to be someone on whom, in Henry James's phrase, "nothing is lost." All this comes through on-the-job training, through solitary learning of a craft. It is a long-shot bet that someday one's undeveloped talent will come near one's already highly developed ambition. For most, it never comes close.

I taught would-be novelists, poets, and essayists for three decades at Northwestern University. Many of them demonstrated much greater ability than I at their age, yet nothing much has happened to the vast majority of them. Or, rather, the world happened to them, intervening in their grand plans to become serious writers by placing genuine obstacles in their way or by holding out other prospects and possibilities: marriage and family, honorable and better-paying work, the temptations of journalism. However high the degree of their talent, the desire, I have to assume, was not sufficiently in-

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tense in them to do what was required. As for whence the desire itself derives, that is yet another mystery.

One of the obstacles is the writing life itself, which is generally much less glamorous than is imagined. Although every so often a serious writer resoundingly rings the great commercial gong, sending him from welfare recipient to multi-millionaire, the number of men and women in the United States today who are able to live exclusively off their writing and do not need to supplement their literary income with revenue from teaching, lecturing, public readings (if they are lucky enough to get them), working on movie or television scripts, or performing jobs unrelated to writing is probably well below 500.

Things get worse. Mordecai Richler, the Canadian novelist, once said that he divided his life between the time before he decided to become a writer and the time after—and the time before was better. What I believe Richler meant was that once one determines to write, one no longer confronts experience directly; it becomes "copy," recyclable in stories, articles, essays, poems. True, nothing in a skilled writer's life is wasted. But there is something mildly—and sometimes more than mildly—gruesome about collecting experience for one's work the way a certain kind of person collects grievances. I, for one, would never make the mistake my wife did of marrying a writer.

If one cannot learn one's craft through formal schooling, if one is highly unlikely to earn a good living at it, and if the writer's vocation tends to bring out the less pleasant side of one's nature, why would anyone want to risk it? (H. L. Mencken had no tolerance for the little *Iliad* of woes I have just compiled. When writers complained to him about the arduousness of their lot, he used to propose that they go try a week on an assembly line.)

When the going is good for a writer, though, it cannot be bettered. For writers whose productivity comes to fruition in regular publication, the activity itself is its own reward—and practicing it beats all other regular employment. Once one has achieved a relative mastery over one's craft, the pleasures of composition are like few others: certainly none that I have known. Constructing well-made sentences, in which words and thought appear to make a seamless fit, causing the small but intense light of insight to click on, can only be compared, I should imagine, to the delight of dancing faultlessly to one's own choreography.

Where do the words come from? The same mysterious place, I suspect, where notes of music go. They precede ideas, and are inseparable from them. For myself, I bow my head, touch wood, and utter a small prayer that the flow of them never cease.

Motivation, meanwhile, is as various as the subjects upon which one feels called upon to write, varying from time to time, subject to subject. I should like Dr. Flaherty to know that my two motives in writing this essay have been, first, to collect a decent fee, and, second, to try to knock down her book as an assemblage of profoundly muddled notions that I, given my calling, find mildly but genuinely offensive.

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The Company You Keep

A Story

John J. Clayton

Liebowitz comes into my office again. He knocks, though why bother since he enters at the same exact instant, waves at me in disgust and sits his fat behind on the ribs of the old-fashioned radiator. It's been painted and painted until it's become a layered sculpture; the iron ribs must be uncomfortable as hell. "Myron, please sit like a regular person." I get up and pull the chair from the side of my desk. Then I realize—his hips wouldn't come close to fitting between the armrests. I feel bad I might have shamed him, but he hasn't noticed.

"I thought you were coming to our morning minyan." He raises ragged eyebrows.

"I got to bed late last night," I say.

"Please." He adjusts the knotted strings at the corners of the little fringed garment an observant Jew wears under his shirt. The knotted strings dangle down the outside of his pants to remind him of the 613 mitzvot, the opportunities God has given him to perform His commandments. "If you got there," he sighs, "you would have been the tenth man. We would have had a quorum."

"Thanks, Myron."

"Look, you think I'm demeaning you? God forbid! I want you to see how important you are." He widens his bulbous eyes and holds his hands open, cradling my importance like an infant. "But that's not what I came for."

"Then what?"

"It's Friedman, the anti-Semite."

"Now Friedman's an anti-Semite? Friedman's Jewish."

"I'm telling you, Peter, the son of a bitch is going to fire me in the next downsizing."

"He can't fire you. Your work is too important."

"No? He looks at me and what does he see? A slob? No, worse. He looks at me and sees . . . ," he raises a lecturing forefinger, "an embarrassment. Am I wrong? Tell me. If I'm a Jew and he's a Jew, then maybe people will judge him by me. *Farshtayst?*"

"You want me to talk to him?"

Liebowitz closes his eyes and spreads his arms like wings, his fingers feathers, as if to say, it's as God wills. I want to say to him, You *are* a slob. Your black pants are grease-stained. And that shirt? Ring around the sleeves, not just the collar. But we'd get into: Aha!—Why are *you* so uneasy just because a Jew wears a traditional black coat and a yarmulke? Don't I do valuable work for the company? And all of a sudden the question would be turned around: Why do you need to assimilate so totally? Are you ashamed of your own people? In the meantime, look what's happening to your son!

John J. Clayton, *the author of two novels and two collections of short stories, taught modern literature until recently at the University of Massachusetts. His previous stories in* Commentary *are "The Contract" (February 2003), "Adult Fiction" (May 2003), and "Fables of the Erotic Other" (October 2003).*

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He's got me there, even without saying a thing. He knows how I feel. But all he says to me, eyebrow cocked, is, "You've got a good Jewish heart. And don't worry too much about David."

I do worry. My son David attends a private school in Cambridge. That's maybe my first mistake. Why didn't I send him to a Jewish day school? Well, for one thing, his mother wouldn't put up with it. But to be honest, it was me, too. And now it's too late.

Here's a snapshot: David and me last Saturday morning, me asking him, "Why don't you come with me to services? Come on."

My son lifts his eyes from the television to heaven: "Da-ad." This is whined rather than spoken. "I got my bar mitzvah, didn't I? And it's like, I get so bored there, and anyway I have soccer later."

V'shinantam l'vanecha: "Teach them diligently to your children." But what can I say to the boy? My son, you're fourteen. Maybe when you grow up you'll change your mind? Me, I changed my mind considerably. As a kid I was sour on prayer, too. I'd become a socialist. This was in the early 70's, long ago: black and white, rich and poor, Vietnam. At BU, while ostensibly majoring in Poli Sci, I got deeper and deeper into protest.

Look, I still feel it wasn't foolish, the longing for a new society. But it was also a con—because, frankly, I became a bum. Always there was a meeting, always there were girls, and afterward they believed they were contributing to the revolution if they came up to the apartment I shared in Brighton. I pretended my anarchic individualism was an antidote to the injustices of bourgeois America, when it was only a parody—bourgeois America all over again. Me, me, me. Liberation in front of a mirror.

I married and divorced, no children. Eventually, in loneliness and earned shame, I married again—Karen, my woman of valor, her value far beyond pearls. Well. At times. Two children—my boy, David, now fourteen, and Shira, she's ten. It was after David was born that I came back to the synagogue: Conservative, not Orthodox. I've learned to say the prayers, to understand a little Hebrew, to love the Sabbath. I admit it sometimes feels like something I've put on, a costume. I'm part of a generation of the lost, and here we are trying to transmit to our children a culture that doesn't live in our bones.

My mother, who was brought up Orthodox, used to tell me about the fathers in Yiddish plays, grieving over sons who'd abandoned their traditions. That's not what it's like. The traditions, they were lost a long time ago. I'm thinking of those Canadian geese that are bred by the Department of Fish and Wildlife to replenish the stock for hunters; without parents to teach them, they lose the ancient lessons of migration. There are lots of these Canadian geese, lots: they fly here, they fly there, they eat well, they drive around in BMW's and drink good chardonnay.

Liebowitz shrugs his way out of my office with a "shalom," neglecting to shut the door. Did I say he weighs more than 275 pounds? It's painful to watch him waddle off, lugging that behind. But he's one smart guy. At MIT he took a BA in math, an MA in linguistics. One day he tells me about his analysis of Shakespeare's English, how the beauty of the language arises from its mixed origins. He published a paper about it. Raising a lecture-finger, he announces, "Don't stereotype me. I'm not a peasant. Did you know I played Falstaff a couple of years ago in community theater? You see? You're surprised, aren't you?"

This he loves. But nothing surprises me about Liebowitz. He's our house genius: he does linguistic encoding for our main software product, a program that uses a search engine to find audio and visual signals on selected topics. Say, investment in Indonesia. Say, oil exploration in the Arctic. The program scans the web for video clips stored in cyberspace: board meetings, news stories, university lectures. Liebowitz's job is to figure out ways to name the bits of language, the patterns, that the search program goes after. It's tricky. But perfect for a student of Talmud who also happens to be a linguist and a smart programmer.

My job is to sell this program, which is still in development, and to find more seed money. I'm good at what I do. But if anyone's expendable, it's me, not Liebowitz. Near lunchtime I walk upstairs in the remodeled Cambridge townhouse and knock on Friedman's door.

These days, Jon Friedman, our illustrious founder and president, is mainly a communication link between the corporation that's bought us up and the folks who do the work. He shines with charisma and credentials, teaching a course a year and working with graduate students at MIT. Here he's supposedly in charge of "the big picture"—facilitating research, making sure the separate design tracks meld properly, staying in touch with clients. So he's always busy but does nothing concrete, though at a high comfort level. I should make such a living.

"Come in, my man," he says, and strides toward me across his big, woody, corner office, the old Cambridge bay window facing east and bringing in

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beautiful autumn light. He captures my hand in both of his and squeezes. "Sit down, sit down, you're just the man I want to talk to."

So the agenda becomes his. I sit, he sits. Sunlight on leather is soothing. He crosses one leg over the other. "I just got off the phone with corporate. Joe Welch. We've got six months."

"What? They're going to kill us off in six months?"

"Not really. You know, they like timetables. But it's produce or perish. So what do you think?"

"It's reasonable. I'll talk to the team . . . I just talked to Liebowitz."

"Uch. Liebowitz."

"That's what I came to see you about. He thinks you've got something against him."

Friedman laughs. "Peter, Peter, don't be such a softy. From this chair I see a guy who's costing everybody in health insurance. Costing you, costing me, costing Martha the cleaning lady."

"But look at what he does."

"Don't worry, his job is secure while the project's up. Just keep him out of the way when Joe Welch comes through. All he needs is to see a fat slob in a black yarmulke."

"And then?"

"M'man?" He pretends to whisper: "When the project's up and running, I can get us a graduate student."

I'm remembering my poor Aunt Ceil on my mother's side. Same story. She was a fashion designer, and for a season, maybe two, she'd be hired to design a line of dresses until the manufacturer dumped her and let somebody just out of the Fashion Institute copy her ideas at half the cost. I remember her after her stroke, an enraged old lady in the Hebrew Home for the Aged. What I want right now, I want to reach across the desk, take Friedman by his Hermès tie and slam his handsome face against his teak desk.

Do I? No. But what I say doesn't make him so happy. "I think you should reconsider. Get sued under the Americans with Disabilities Act, it would cost the corporation a lot more."

"Peter? We're just talking hypothetically, man."

"Right. I know." I settle down and remember my own mantra: *tuition*, *tuition*. David's education at Stone Hill doesn't come cheap. I give Jon Friedman my warmest boyish smile, the smile that's protected me since childhood.

Anyway, why should I defend Liebowitz? People make choices. Liebowitz isn't stupid. He's particularly smart when it comes to code; so he's made himself into a code for others to read. His black coat, his yarmulke and beard—you could say they encode a 4,000-year-old tradition, or at least the life of a Jew in a shtetl of Eastern Europe, or, maybe, the simplified myth of that life, now gone in Europe and reimagined. The rabbis are said to have built a fence around the Torah, the ten thousand distinctions—kashering your kitchen, standing up to honor the Torah—that can preserve holiness, be bridges to holiness. But they can also be debased into marks of a club, a club that separates us from each other and from God. How to tell the difference?

THERE ARE ten of us working in this old, narrow house with bay windows on every floor. I think it's funny, the chipped plaster moldings and mahogany banisters, the flowered wallpaper and high ceilings—all the old charm set against the slim screens, fat cables snaking through walls and along the floor, computers with 64-bit technology stacked in a corner that once held a piano. It's a peculiar office; people schmooze a lot. They laugh, they laugh, and the work progresses. Or they retreat to their desks and work listening to music over headphones, the whole place silent except for Liebowitz scratching hieroglyphs on one of his blackboards.

I pass through the main room, formerly the parlor, at lunchtime; Liebowitz is studying a volume of Talmud. Lunch takes him five minutes, the blessings another five, and the rest of the hour is devoted to a single page of Talmud, maybe less if the going is rough. This is a passive-aggressive act of protest, a way of demanding the office he was promised but hasn't received. Why hasn't Friedman delivered? The house is big enough, and there's a nice room on the third floor that's now used for storage. So there's passive aggression on both sides.

For traditional Jews, Talmud has the sanctity of Torah—it is Torah. In what was once the parlor, Liebowitz rocks and mumbles, chanting the text in singsong. The other employees don't mind—they smile at this fat, passionate, mumbling man. But if you didn't know this was the proper way to study, you'd think it was a little *meshugeh*, crazy. Which is what Joseph Welch must be thinking when he walks through the office one day with Jon Friedman.

They don't stop and stare. They just walk through. But as soon as Welch has gone, out comes Friedman. "Where's Liebowitz?" he asks quietly. The two of them go back to Friedman's office. You hear a voice in angry tenor, lifting toward alto as it lists offenses; you hear a laconic baritone. Tenor. Baritone. The rest of us retreat to our offices, our desks. My stomach's turning over. God keep me from having to make choices.

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I'm seriously irritated at Liebowitz for giving me trouble. Why does he have to put on such a display? But then I ask, why does he have to hide? Besides, it's his own time. And where's the private office he was promised? Anyway, who's he bothering?

Ten minutes Liebowitz and Friedman talk. I keep my door half-open. Then they go to Liebowitz's cubicle, and in a few minutes out comes Liebowitz with a big carton that once held a monitor and is now full of his personal supplies, laptop, books, pretzels. A framed picture of his parents sits on top. Friedman, hands in pockets, is escorting him, as they say, "from the premises." Liebowitz looks ridiculous, leaning back, carton propped against his belly. But he gives me a look, like, *You see?* And that's the moment I make the jump.

I'm just as surprised as Friedman, as if the words weren't mine. "Myron, you need help with that box?" He shrugs. I leave my office, follow the two of them down the hall. When Friedman turns on his heels at the front door, I ask Myron, loud enough so the folks in the main office can hear, "Can you come to dinner by us tonight?" "By us" is a Yiddish locution, and I'm speaking with a subtle lilt that I've borrowed for the occasion. Has Friedman heard? I'm sure. But I don't look back at him. My heart's thumping in my temples, I think *tuition, tuition.* But I keep going. "About six? Okay?" As if it were an ordinary event.

"Thank you," he says. "You're a real mensch."

All the whiz kids out in the common workspace look my way, Jeanne, Mel, Gareth, the whole crew exchanging shrugs, grimaces, eye-rollings, grins. I smile back, feeling they're on my side. My blood is up, fingers tingling—what a rush! I haven't taken a risky position in 30 years, maybe not since the day, in college, I lay down in front of Army trucks and wasn't 100-percent certain they'd stop.

By the time I get home I'm more uneasy, less heroic. As if she were my doctor, Karen listens to the story and shakes her head. "If anything happens, God forbid, you'll get another job. But why stick your neck out for one of these black-hatters. *Mad* hatters, my father used to call them. He wanted nothing to do with them."

"I don't mean to disparage the wisdom of your father, but the color of Myron's hat is not the issue, honey. His being a fellow Jew is not the issue. Fair is fair, that's all."

"Fair is fair, but look at the rotten position he puts you in."

Too tired to argue, I go to pick up David from soccer practice at Stone Hill, and on the way home, in rush-hour traffic, stuck at a light, I tell him the story, looking for a second opinion. You don't have to ask twice to get an opinion from David: "That's completely lousy and disgusting."

"He'd been warned, Liebowitz. No Talmud on company time. But it was his lunchtime."

"What a stinking bastard, that Friedman."

"Watch the language. Well, Friedman was embarrassed. But I guess you're right. So. I invited Myron Liebowitz home for dinner, David. I figured he'd want to talk." All of a sudden I realize—wait!—the guy has a family. Four kids, a wife, and I invited just him. And what about the meal? In my house we don't mix meat and milk or eat forbidden foods, but we also don't keep separate dishes, and the kitchen hasn't been kashered. On the way home I buy a bottle of kosher wine and a new set of wine glasses.

This brings me home a few minutes after six. I'm sure Myron will be late. But he's not, he's there before me. Nor is he alone. Nor is food going to be an insignificant part of the evening. I hear kids' voices laughing as I open the door. I hear women's voices. Karen comes to the door and gives me a look. She's been smiling, but for me her face turns grim. I mouth, *I had no idea.*

"Come," she says, with a pleasantness I'm supposed to read as phony, "meet Zahava Liebowitz. *And* Eli *and* Uri . . . *and* Leah. Plus the baby. And here's Myron I know you know." I hide under my shoulders and hand her the bottle of wine. "Good," she says. "How nice you could join us."

"*You* should have driven home in that traffic," I manage, wishing it on her. "Hello, Myron." I nod at the whole crew, a plump, pretty young woman holding a baby, kids frozen for an instant, then running. I catch Karen's eye, she follows me to the closet where I hang up my jacket. I whisper, "What are we going to feed these people?"

Now she laughs. "Oh, that you don't have to worry about. Go look in the kitchen."

Two little kids run past, almost tripping me. On the kitchen table is the same huge carton that Myron used to carry his personal stuff away from the company. It's covered with a tablecloth. Peeking in, I see a stainless steel canning pot with its cover duct-taped down. Even with the lid on, I can smell the soup, and along with the soup they've brought bread wrapped in foil, bowls of many kinds and colors, knives, soup spoons, a big bottle of juice, a bottle of wine, a package of plastic cups. So I'm laughing, "Myron, we invited you, and *you* bring the dinner? I should invite you more often."

"We're used to this if we visit a nonkosher fami-

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ly." He smiles broadly; it comes to me that he's decided to make this a celebration, not a funeral. His smile fills the kitchen; he seems to have relaxed outward, expanded magically beyond even his usual breadth, and he stretches out his arms, fat palms up like a scroungy Atlas holding up the world. "Peter, Peter, what a great thing you did today. Zahava, what did I say?"

"A great thing," she echoes.

I shake my head, I laugh, but this is the story and I'm trapped in it, especially since my David is grinning at me, actually proud of me, my son. I'm a rebel again, I'm lying in the street blocking trucks. And since David's at an age when he orders me to drop him across the street from school so I won't be seen by his friends, I like it. I inhabit Liebowitz's story. I lift my hands in surrender; I must be blushing. I can feel my gestures taking on Myron's *Yiddishkeit* by the minute.

We open the Liebowitz bottle of sweet kosher cough syrup and Myron offers a special blessing since this is the first time his family has shared a glass of wine with us, and then a blessing over the wine, and I'm giddy with the feeling that I'm acting in a play—but all right, it's a beautiful Jewish play. And at the same time I'm full of heart, irony having been left behind at the office.

"David can have a little bit of wine, can't he? He's already a bar mitzvah."

"A very little." I hold thumb and forefinger millimeters apart.

WE HAVE a big old kitchen, it's the one room of the Somerville house we left untouched: lots of light, big pine cabinets. With chairs dragged in from the living room, there's space for all of us to sit around the table. Zahava hands the baby to Liebowitz and spreads out the table cloth. She's such a contrast to her husband—neat as a pin, her marriage wig covered by a white kerchief. Perhaps she thinks she's doubly protected against the looks of men, but I have to admit, I'm looking. She couldn't be more than thirty. Her face is so placid. Under the kerchief it reminds me of the oval faces in Vermeer's paintings, big eyes and soft skin. My heart opens. What is it like for her to be with a wild expressive force like Liebowitz? What's it like on a Friday night, to be weighed down by such a massive creature?

Now Myron invites us to wash our hands. David asks, "How come? My hands aren't dirty." But it's a ritual washing, a purification, and afterwards Myron puts a finger over his lips and closes his eyes, says the blessing over the bread, a homemade loaf of rye with caraway seeds. Everyone hushes till the bread is cut and passed, and now the talk spills out. Karen serves the soup; it's room temperature, because Zahava won't heat things up on our stove. But good. Myron's two boys are having a playful kicking match under the table. Our daughter Shira is of an age with Leah, and they're in a separate conversation.

Liebowitz settles into the biggest chair I've got. I'm seeing him differently here in his black coat and stained white shirt, beard and hat tilted back. It's as if his corpulence has become an expression of character, as if the fat were power instead of an uphill battle for the blood, as if the beard were lines of electric energy. Sighing over his soup, he puts a hand on David's shoulder. "Tell me, David, do you know the argument between the house of Hillel and the house of Shammai about the blessing over the bread?"

"*Whose* houses?"

"David, you're joking. You don't know any Talmud?"

And now out comes something so shocking my eyes bulge and I stop breathing for a couple of seconds. Looking down at his plate, David replies, "Talmud? They told us something in Hebrew school but . . . but I've always wanted to learn about it."

David?

Myron Liebowitz turns to me. "It would be my great honor," he chants, hand over heart, "to teach your son Talmud. You could say that our friend Friedman has given me a stipend for that purpose."

"A stipend?"

"As I told your lovely wife before you came home, Friedman gave me a choice. If I fight him, he'll fire me 'for cause.' Then what happens? I get *bubkes*. What do we live on? No unemployment compensation. But if I don't make a stink, I'll get a severance package. It's like a stipend for me to study Talmud—and teach David."

Now David begins to squirm. Sure. It's easy to say, "I've always wanted," but when push comes to shove. . . . "Mr. Liebowitz? I'm too busy to do much more homework."

"What homework? If we do a page of Talmud, that's a great mitzvah. Better you don't read in advance. We'll look at it together."

Do I really want this?

Dinner finished, David excuses himself, but Myron raises his hands like a wall. "Wait. You forgot the blessing."

David looks at me. I say, "*Birkat hamazon*, David. Remember? Sit a minute." But the minute turns

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into five, ten, as God is praised for the food and the land, for His mercy and compassion and our sustenance. And David says, "Okay, now?" I nod; he's off. Shira takes Leah up to her room, the boys go looking for a TV, and only the adults remain.

Liebowitz sighs. "I want you to understand, Peter: I know what a fool I am. You were very kind to me. A real Jew. A fellow-Jew." He thumps his chest and tears well up.

"Not the point, not the point, Myron."

"I goaded him, all right? I get like that. Listen. In our own shul they think I'm a little *meshugeh*. Please. It's true. We have zero friends because of me. I say this in front of my own wife. I don't want her to be ashamed of me." He closes his eyes and rocks.

I feel that this is not the first time she's heard all this. Zahava puts a little hand on Liebowitz's giant hand, and in that second I go through a whole alternative life. I'm married to this sweet, pretty woman with a baby in her arms and we're living a deeply observant life together, the kind that Karen would resist with the force of an upraised eyebrow, and we have ten children to mess and enrich our kosher home, and we get old and beautiful together and grandchildren—seventeen, eighteen, nineteen grandchildren—are born to the family; you can imagine what seders! And maybe, erasing, erasing, back in 1980 I didn't get an MBA; no, I became a rabbi, I'm Reb Peter, no I'm Reb Shmuel, and on Friday nights our lovemaking is dedicated to the Holy One, blessed be He.

And Myron Liebowitz says *he's* a fool?

He has tears in his eyes. He puts his hand on my sleeve. "With you, I can talk," he says.

So it's settled. During the next couple of weeks, I come home a few times to hear a talmudic singsong and find Myron Liebowitz sitting at the kitchen table with David. Liebowitz's black hat is tilted way back like a cowboy's; David is wearing a yarmulke. Nice. I wish I had a picture. But Karen, writing a grant application for her clinic at the dining-room table, looks at me through the open door with those eyebrows, one up, one down, her semaphore signal of displeasure: why do I have to listen to this *meshugas*? And the deeper message, which I'm able to figure out because it's making dots and dashes inside my own head, too: how would you like David to dress in a long black coat and fedora and end up in a hasidic yeshiva?

A couple of times, on his way out to his car in the twilight, Myron stops, holds me by the shoulder with his immense hand, looks into my eyes, and nods. This kind of intimacy isn't comfortable for me. I say, as if to a buddy, "Want a beer before you head off?" He strokes his beard and says, "Peter, I've been looking all over for decent work. Work where I can use my intelligence. Why do I go shoot myself in my big foot? Tell me why? *Moshe rabbeynu*, Moses our teacher, was called 'the most humble man.' So what business do I have acting like such a big shot?"

I shake my head. I've made a few calls. But high-level jobs in information technology are scarce, even for geniuses. And, frankly, I get queasy trumpeting Liebowitz to friends of mine. With a job market like today's, would he make it past an interview? So I sympathize, I walk him out to his car, a Chevy van rusting at the seams, big, but still he takes up the driver's seat and half the passenger seat. "Goodbye, *landsman*," he says, and drives off in the dark.

Then Jon Friedman calls one evening—another first. "M'man," he drawls, as if he were—what?—a black jazz musician from the 50's. "Suppose I pop over to that big Somerville estate of yours with a nice bottle of Margaux I've acquired. You think we could have ourselves a little drink together?" Big estate, little drink, nice Margaux: I try to puzzle out the significance of these adjectives. You can feel him trying to charm, to disarm. My hackles stiffen, but I say, "Sure, Jon. We're not all that busy at the Somerville end," getting my aggression out. "Fine, fine," he says, ignoring me. "Something to share with you, m'man."

Half an hour later he's ringing the bell. I've warned Karen and the kids; they've disappeared, though Karen says, "I've always liked Margaux. Save me a little?" In comes Friedman, dressed in a hooded maroon sweatshirt with a logo, pulling it off to reveal a blue silk shirt underneath. He's threaded his belt through the leather patch of his jeans to show the Versace logo. It's a peculiar signal: I'm an ordinary guy . . . but so cool.

We open the wine and sit in the study among my clutter of books. "It's about our friend Myron Liebowitz." He sighs, clinks glasses, sits back in a leather club chair, sips. Each sip, I figure wildly, must cost at least five dollars. He sips, I sip. "Look. Pete, we're in the days of awe, am I right? You're a *landsman*, Pete, a kinsman. So you know what I'm talking about. Days of atonement, days of making amends. Rabbi talked about it. See, eve of Rosh Hashanah, eve of Yom Kippur, I touch base with my roots, Ruthie and I get dressed up, go to temple."

"So you think you should make amends to Myron Liebowitz?"

"Yes and no. What do you think?"

I swing my desk chair around to face him, wheel myself closer. I sip another five bucks' worth and say, "Jon, what I think is that you've not been able to re-

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place our *landsman* Myron. That's what I think." I take another drink. One thing about good wine—the more you sip, the better it gets.

"There's that, too. It's true. I've been looking all over." His face droops.

"So you can give the guy a call, Jon."

"I can't. I *can't*. You know what'll happen. He'll get on his high horse and I'll get on my high horse and we'll joust and fall off our horses. There's absolutely no point. But you can talk to him. What do you think? I apologize, you think he'll come back?"

"It's possible. But it's not likely. Which I hate to say, Jon, because in fact we need the guy. We need him if we want 3.0 to be up and running on schedule."

"So why not likely?"

I chew this over, sipping, and lie a little. "I happen to know he had a job lined up before he left us. In D.C. A lot more money. Something to do with government-funded research."

"Ah, shit. How much more?"

"That I don't know. But"—I consider this at length—"I hear his wife wants to stay here in Boston, so we may have a chance."

"Call him, call the son of a bitch, offer him whatever. See if he can be there first thing in the morning. If that's no good, well, anytime tomorrow. For the good of the company, I'll eat crow."

I can see what's happening with this wine, so I get on the phone and call Karen's line upstairs. "Honey? Better get on down here." I tell Friedman, "Karen's busy, but a nice little wine like this, she's got to have a drink with us. Don't you think?"

"Right, right."

So she does. And as soon as Jon's off, we share a laugh over the empty bottle and, feeling pretty good, I head for the phone. Zahava and I have a little talk. Liebowitz gets on and yells at me because I'm all he has to yell at and he can feel he's done his sacred duty. The mitzvah of yelling. Hanging up, I'm discouraged, but in a few minutes the guy calls back. "Zahava convinced me," he says. "Where am I going to get another good job with the economy the way it is? A Jew has a family to support. Maimonides tells us . . . "

I'M IN the office early next morning, one eye on the plants hanging in Friedman's bay window, sort of holding Friedman's hand. He spews out worries. The economy, the corporation, the bottom line. Copyright infringements. Have I been suggesting Friedman's a fool? He's smart, not just a bureaucrat. The software concept was his in the first place. It's emotionally that he's a fool; vanity, the great fool-maker.

Just after nine, a knock at the door, Friedman is beaming a prize-winning smile—the one that must have melted the hearts of his audience when he won the Promising Technology Researcher award some years back—when he sees what's up. In comes Myron Liebowitz in basic black, thick as a Jewish Santa Claus. I see Friedman shut his eyes for an instant—against his own revulsion, I think.

This disturbs me. Is that my son David in 25, 30 years, separating himself from other Jews, a new generation of the lost?

He's shifting papers on his desk, Friedman. "Real glad you could come in, Myron."

"God willing, we can work out our differences," Liebowitz says. "It's a very great thing," he raises his lecture-finger, "peace among Jews." I see he means this; when Liebowitz gets emotional his eyes fog up, his deep voice quavers, and he sucks in half the air in a room.

"Jews?" Friedman says, and he emits a dismissive bark. He's amused. Oh, no he's not: he's playing amused, he's signifying amusement. "Jews ain't the point, kid. Look, if you want to wear black and so on and so on, you go right ahead. That's your business. I'll try to be decent with you. Okay? I didn't mean to put you down. Or—anyway, I had no right. But we've got to be professionals if we're going to work together. I expect professional demeanor: no chanting, no slovenliness. Okay? Think we can come to an understanding?"

Friedman's unstated aggression is eating at Liebowitz. I can see it. I sit down with a noisy sigh, I rattle papers, I say, "We need to bring Myron up to speed on new client needs at Yale."

Too late. Liebowitz hovers hugely over Friedman's desk. Friedman starts to get up, but this puts him inches from Liebowitz's beard. He sits back down; there's safety in teak. He's slight, Friedman. Liebowitz has him by 125 pounds and a good six inches. I'm half-imagining Liebowitz intends to pound him with his fist, hammer him down through his chair. He's pointing a big forefinger. He leans over the desk, arms straight, palms on the teak, and says, "Before we talk about software, I want you to understand, Jon Friedman. I'm here *nicely* this time, but I'm not forgetting. You let your Jew-hating loose again, next time I come in here, it's with a minyan—ten at least—everybody in beards and black hats, we'll be praying when the corporate boys are here. Or we'll study Talmud in the parlor, you should hear how loud!"

I don't know if Friedman has registered the threat of a sit-in minyan, but what he explodes at is "Jew-hating." I'm surrounded by rage, and me, I'm furious at both of them. Friedman shrieks something like, "How dare you, you fat slob, how dare

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you? I'm as much of a Jew as you are." I hear stirrings—whiz kids in the main room. "Liebowitz," I shout over both their voices, "you call this nicely? This is a rotten betrayal."

"Betrayal. Exactly," he answers. I meant Liebowitz; Liebowitz means Friedman—and me.

"He's been trying to apologize, you shmuck! How can you do this to us?"

"Aha!" Liebowitz yells. "Us. Now we see where *you* stand." And he storms out of Friedman's office. The whiz kids scatter, pretend they've been busy.

"I'll have to change the locks," Friedman says, mournfully.

I figure that's it—the end for Liebowitz, and maybe the beginning of the end for me, too. Look how silent Friedman becomes around me, though sugary sweet to everyone else this afternoon. Needless to say, I don't want Liebowitz anywhere near me—or near David. When he calls that night, I hang up on him. Karen says, "You see? Black hatters!" I give her a sullen look. "Neither of them came off well this morning. Friedman, Liebowitz, they can both go to hell." I go sit in my study. He accused me of betrayal? The fool. I replay and replay the scene. Sure, I did say, "How can you do this to us?" But meaning what? I meant us good guys, accomplices in getting him his job back, him and me. At least I think I did.

This means more to me than you'd think. I flash back to a line of protesters, the Boston Common, 1971, facing a line of police, and all around me guys heckling the cops, "You f—ing pigs, you lousy f—ing pigs," "Oink, oink, you bastards," and I'm trying to shush them. "What good will that do?" I yell. "Stop. They're not your real enemy, those guys."

And bang, I'm slammed in the back by somebody's fist. Hard. Lucky I'm wearing an Army-surplus leather flak jacket. "*You're* the real enemy," the guy yells. "Maybe you're a pig, too. Informant! Anybody know this guy? This guy a stoolie? Hey, stoolie, keep your f—ing mouth shut." And I did. I slipped away, walked to the rear and down a side street just before the cops came down with clubs. And that night I watched it on local TV—the "riot," the guys being hauled away by ambulance. I didn't know where I stood. I didn't stand anywhere.

Next night, I come home late. Zahava, baby on her hip, is sitting with Karen at the kitchen table. David, too. He's home from school, they're all sitting, and Karen is holding Zahava's hand. This is beyond me. Zahava has brought a bottle of water, Karen has a cup of tea; they're buddies. The baby, Shlomo, begins to cry, and Zahava rocks, rocks. David tries to distract the baby with jangling keys. And Karen, my wife, she says, "What this beautiful young woman goes through!"

Karen's eyes are wet. Zahava's eyes are wet. "Myron is so ashamed. That's how he gets. He feels so terrible what he did to you. He's got a big mouth. And too much pride."

I close my eyes. "He threatened Friedman he was coming back with a bunch of—"

"Oh, listen, I know, I know, I heard what he said. He told me, he was so ashamed. You don't know what a joke this is! Who would go do such a thing? Who from our community would do such a thing—embarrass your Mr. Friedman? For my Myron? They think Myron's a little *meshugeh*. But he's not crazy-crazy—he just goes overboard. At Chabad House he tells them, 'What do you know? Maybe you know Talmud, but you don't know a thing about Western culture, you don't know Goethe or Kafka or Joyce.' He says, 'Even Shakespeare you don't know. My beautiful Shakespeare,' he says. 'How can I talk to a *grobyan* like you?' You see? My poor Myron, he's so alone."

Karen is squeezing her hand, wiping the tears from her cheek. David takes the baby on his lap. "You've got to help this sweet little family," Karen says quietly, as if suddenly I'm the one who needs convincing.

Listen, I'm convinced enough. She must love him, that fat brilliant fool. And my little erotic fantasy? It dissolves, I have to tell you—I'm looking at Zahava in her long skirt and soft skin as someone to protect, a grown child, my own daughter. I want to lay my hand on her *shaytl* and offer a blessing, but you can't touch an Orthodox woman, and anyway I'm afraid Karen will think I'm peculiar, too. I say, "I'm not the one Myron needs to apologize to."

"No," Karen says to me. "And he *will* speak to Friedman," and Zahava nods, nods, nods, of course, of course. "But—" my Karen says, "maybe you can soften Friedman up just a little, honey? Kind of buffer the apology?" All of a sudden I'm "honey." Will wonders never cease, as my mother used to say with no question mark.

Frankly, I'm a little nervous. No, I'm scared. It's hard to be brave when I remember my mortgage. I see myself out on the job market in this terrible winter, depending just on Karen's salary from the clinic. I see myself managing some retail outlet. I see myself selling laptops. Still, after Zahava leaves and after we've had dinner, I call Friedman and I say, "Jon, it's me. Can I stop by for a few minutes, m'man? With a nice bottle of wine?" And I drive out to Concord with a bottle of vintage Manischewitz. I'm hoping Friedman sees the joke.

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AND I guess he does. I mean, I don't get fired after all, though who knows what could happen next month; and after a lot of talking I won't bore you with, Liebowitz is back with us. Yes! Liebowitz is back.

It's a sunny day, and don't tell me that has nothing to do with it. Trees on the Cambridge side street in full autumn color, and Liebowitz says a blessing for the beauty, and what can Friedman say? So he says, "Right, amen." And I sit between them, middleman that I am, and Liebowitz says this and this and this to me, and I turn and translate into that and that and that. And Friedman says into the air, Well, blah, blah, blah, and I translate as Generosity, Rationality, Teamwork. And we talk about the software; because that's a language we have in common. And by the end of the half-hour, Liebowitz doesn't love Friedman and Friedman doesn't love Liebowitz and both of them probably—no, definitely—think I'm suspect, a trimmer and a weasel. Maybe I am. Nevertheless, Liebowitz winds up with that nice office on the third floor and a lot more money, and after this, you can't hear his lunchtime chanting.

But if at lunchtime you go upstairs and stand outside his office door—*Myron Liebowitz, Linguistic Programming*—you can hear the rise and fall of his Aramaic.

He's sitting on the window seat of the big bay window with the leather-bound volume in his lap. "Stay a few minutes—we can study a few lines of *Berakhot*. Peter, do you know, from this window I can catch a glimpse of the Fogg. I'll tell you—this is some office." He opens the window to a blast of cold air and leans so far out he has to lift his feet from the floor, and I imagine all that weight crunching through the sidewalk.

"Myron, be careful leaning out."

"Oh, sure, sure." He comes inside, shuts the window and sighs a sigh of pleasure.

It's a swell office, with its old, fancy architectural details, the ceiling sporting an oval garland of flowers in plaster. Of course that's not the first thing you see. Papers everywhere, and Myron's three monitors, fat cables strapped down with gaffer's tape, a blackboard smeared with symbols and erasures. On one wall, a portrait of the Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson; facing him, the famous portrait of Beethoven. Liebowitz spreads his hands. "We should say a blessing—it's the first time you've visited me up here. And it's thanks to you I'm here." His eyes are shining. "You think I don't understand?" He closes them.

A couple of times since, I've gone up there to read a page, in English translation, from one of the tractates, and he's explained the context. If somebody doesn't clarify what's at stake, you get nothing out of Talmud, it sounds like nonsense. You need a teacher. I guess Liebowitz is my teacher. He rubs his beard, I rub my cheek; we puzzle over the argument about the proper frame of mind in which to pray. The thing about Talmud, it's high drama. People think the Talmud is God's opinion; if so, God's got contradictory opinions. This rabbi says this, that rabbi says that.

A couple of times he's come to the house and studied a page with David, and I've sat in.

See, we've kind of taken them on, the whole family. He tells me, "You're the only one I can speak to." But he's the same fat fool. Frankly, I still prefer his wife. She's the one who'll save him, not me. You should hear him get on his high horse about the patriarchs and the Holy Land and Moses. They say that at the end of days all Jews will be back in the Holy Land as they were at Sinai, and I think Liebowitz has a secret ambition to be resurrected as Moses. And like Moses chastising the people, he chastises me, shaking his head, thundering in his fat-man basso about what a disgrace it is to pretend I'm not a Jew.

I let him talk. I remember what Zahava said about his love for Shakespeare. And look at what's happening to the guy! Talk about assimilation. Subtly, over a couple of months, through a stormy, brutal winter, some of his white shirts, they're becoming button-down. The tzitzit still hang out but the pants are clean.

I can't ask what's up, for fear of pushing him back on his high horse. These changes: are they due to Zahava, or to Liebowitz? He's even trimmed his wild prophet's beard, until by now, in spring, it's not so bushy—a neat shadow of its former self. And the whole family comes to our house. Or we go there. I suppose you could say we've become friends. Lately, I spend an hour, one morning a week, at his little shul a half-hour drive the other side of the Charles. We wrap ourselves in talleisim, we strap on tefillin, we pray.

Karen laughs at me. One day, she says, I'll come home in black with tzitzit hanging outside my black pants. "Worse," I tell her. "I'll take to wearing one side out, one tucked in. I'll wear one black pant leg, one beige. A beard and earlocks on the left side of my face, the other side clean-shaven. On top of my head—maybe a Red Sox cap. A fool in motley."

"You're halfway there," she says. "All you need is the motley."

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OBSERVATIONS

The "Magic" of Gabriel García Márquez

Algis Valiunas

"WHAT, THEN, is the American, this new man?" That is the question famously posed by Crèvecoeur in his 1782 classic, *Letters from an American Farmer*. He answered his own question: the new American, only recently an indigent European, understood that where his bread was, there was his homeland, and upon this foundation he would build a splendid edifice. Diligence, and the abundance it brought, would in turn instill a love of political freedom, as well as of the God Who saw to it that the righteous thrived. "Go thou and work and till; thou shalt prosper, provided thou be just, grateful, and industrious."

Crèvecoeur believed it, millions have believed it since, and there is some real truth to it—provided, of course, that by "American," one means, as Crèvecoeur did, *North* American, and specifically the United States. South of the border, it has always been another story. There, God has not beamed with such paternal tenderness upon the tillers of the soil. Mere subsistence comes hard; prosperity has been a dream too bitter to indulge; and the twin demons of oligarchic luxury and peasant penury have blackened any faith in justice, human or divine.

What, then, is the Latin American, this not so new man? And where does one look for him? Whatever the precise answer to the first question, many people around the world seem to agree that to see him most fully conceived, discerned, and embodied, one need look no further than the work of Gabriel García Márquez, the Colombian novelist and Nobel laureate who has long been resident in Mexico. The Spanish-speaking world itself holds García Márquez in deep reverence. A Spanish newspaper poll placed his most famous novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (U.S. edition 1970), third on the all-time list of world-historical books, after the Bible and *Don Quixote*. But his renown far exceeds the precincts of Spanish speakers. According to a recent article by the novelist Francisco Goldman in the *New York Times Magazine*, García Márquez is "possibly the most famous and generally beloved literary writer *on earth*" (emphasis added).

Although none of García Márquez's other works has achieved quite the celebrity of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, many have been best-sellers and continue to enjoy a high reputation among both critics and readers. The most widely known are *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975), *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985), *The General in His Labyrinth* (1989), and *Of Love and Other Demons* (1994). A large number of his earlier writings—he started publishing short stories in 1947, at the age of nineteen—have likewise been translated into English and remain in print. In the United States, García Márquez is probably as popular now as any serious native-grown novelist. His signature style of writing, known as magic realism, has similarly spread beyond Latin American borders, winning the flattery of imitation by such notable North Americans as Joyce Carol Oates in *Bellefleur*, John Updike in *The Witches of Eastwick*, and Louise Erdrich in her tales of Indian life.

ALGIS VALIUNAS *is the author of* Churchill's Military Histories. *Among his recent contributions to* COMMENTARY *is "Bellow's Progress" (September 2003).*

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Goldman points out, correctly, that García Márquez's fiction has altered the prevailing sense not only of the novel's possibilities but even of Latin American reality. Had García Márquez never written, Latin America would seem an entirely different place. For the legions of his North American readers, historically ignorant of nongringo reality, it might seem hardly to exist at all. Which once again prompts the question: what is the Latin America that emerges from his pages, and who is the Latin American? The answer is unsettling, on several counts.

AS IF to help us approach the question, García Márquez has now published the first volume of his memoirs, *Living to Tell the Tale*.* With numerous digressions and excursuses, the book takes him from his birth in 1928 up to early manhood in 1955; two more volumes are expected to complete the account.

On the very first page of this memoir, García Márquez evokes the fate of the immiserated multitudes of Latin America—a fate that, but for an inborn literary gift and some neat turns of luck, might have been his as well. It is 1950 and he is twenty-two years old, working as a journalist in the Colombian city of Barranquilla and frequenting the Librería Mundo, the World Bookshop. His mother has come to visit him from the remote town where the family lives, but at first he does not recognize her; the experience of bearing and nursing eleven children has marked her irrevocably, until, García Márquez writes, at the age of forty-five she has nothing left of youth.

But there is more to this particular anecdote. The mother has come to enlist her son's help in selling his grandparents' old house in the backwater town of Aracataca, where young "Gabito" had lived until the age of eight. Their two-day trip back home decides the course of his career: Aracataca will serve as the template for Macondo, the fictional town that all the world will know as García Márquez's own, and where beauty of place serves only to accentuate nature's indifference to the human unfortunates who have mysteriously been set down there:

> At dusk, above all in December, when the rains had ended and the air was like a diamond, the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and its white peaks seemed to come right down to the banana plantations on the other side of the river. From there you could see the Arawak Indians moving in lines like ants along the cliffs of the Sierra, carrying sacks of ginger on their backs and chewing pellets of coca to make life bearable.

There is, indeed, much to make life unbearable in this landscape. The heat stuns you like a blow to the head, and scraping together a living can cost more than a life is worth. García Márquez has an eye for the terrible detail that bespeaks this all but unendurable severity. Passing through a fishing village, he notes the astonishing number of men with mutilated arms; it seems they fish with sticks of dynamite, and the explosives have a way of going off in their hands. A whole continent of casual horrors throbs in this matter-of-fact observation.

But if going about one's accustomed business can inevitably make one a casualty in Latin America, there is, for the miraculously fortunate few, the thrill of escaping the general ruck and fashioning an extraordinary life. García Márquez's is a success story that might seem to be very much in the North American mode—a story of pluck and nerve—yet all the more poignant for its singularity. In North America, the dreamy hopes stirred by the tales of Horatio Alger helped move persons of modest talents to pursue ordinary ambitions, thereby establishing a solid middle class. In most of Latin America, a man who made it on his own was heroic without becoming exemplary: then as now, there was lordly wealth and mud-chewing poverty, and very little in between.

García Márquez's own means of escape, and the hallmark of this memoir, was his cult of male energy. In a land of hard unyielding life, he was bent on sucking every last pleasurable drop of juice from body and soul. That was to prove a messy undertaking.

By the age of twenty-two, he boasts here, he had contracted gonorrhea twice and was smoking sixty cigarettes a day of weed so foul it made his bones ache. Drink sustained him through much misery. He took a shine to the company of whores, and even when he was not paying for sexual pleasure, he paid in other ways. A half-century after the fact, the delights of the twenty-year-old Nigromanta, a cocoa beauty, still provoke a rhapsodic welling in García Márquez: "Her bed was joyful and her orgasms rocky and agonized, and she had an instinct for love that seemed to belong more to a turbulent river than to a human being." But then Nigromanta's husband catches García Márquez in bed with her, pulls out a revolver, and nudges him into a game of Russian roulette. The writer soils himself, and is unable to pull the trigger. When the gun proves to be empty, the "terrible humiliation" proceeds to plunge the young stud into long-term despondency.

If García Márquez's career as a Latin American macho ends in gross embarrassment, he is, at least, thoroughly uninhibited in sharing that embarrassment with his readers, who have to suffer through his zestful retelling of it. No less embarrassing, in the same sense, is García Márquez's relentless insistence on his measureless appetite for life—or rather Life, a word and a concept that he invokes with Zorba-like self-infatuation and constantly juxtaposes with its nemesis, Death. The latter, indeed, stalks the pages of this book: by story's end,

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the young García Márquez has known men who met their end by decapitation, throat-slitting, and gut-shooting, and the corpses are stacked high like cordwood.

By far the most consequential death in García Márquez's young life was that of the politician Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a Liberal hero and savior gunned down on a street in Bogotá in 1948. As García Márquez tells it here, he immediately rushed to the scene to find "maddened hordes" setting the city ablaze. He himself indulged in a little sportive looting—snaring a handsome calfskin briefcase in which he would carry his precious manuscripts—until a machine-gun barrage ripped into the mob advancing on the capital building and a mortally wounded man clutched at his trouser cuffs and begged him not to let him die. "Since then," he writes, "I have learned to forget horrors, my own and other people's, but I never forgot the hopelessness of those eyes in the brilliant glow of the fires." The civil war precipitated by Gaitán's assassination, he informs us, left 300,000 Colombians dead.

WAS IT the savagery of politics that made the literary life seem both impossibly remote to García Márquez and all the more alluring? For both him and his Latin American readers, at any rate, art has been above all a means of escape. As he was starting out, the local literary product did not provide much in the way of instruction or inspiration. He read his way through a whole shelf of Colombian novels, but years later could not remember a single one that made any impression. The novelist who really lived for him, who indicated what might be possible, was William Faulkner: the brash provincial who cleared his own path to glory, writing of a defeated land poor as dirt, thin in culture, but defiantly proud.

Though all of the novels on which García Márquez's reputation rests were written after the close of the present volume of memoirs, the themes and experiences they encapsulate are all to be found here, and none more saliently than his Big Subject: the elemental collision between Life and Death.

This is certainly true of *Love in the Time of Cholera*, a novel in which, as he notes, he "tried to plunder" his parents' memories of their courtship. What he ended up writing, however, was a book that came largely out of his own rapturous imagination—a sprawling, nonstop, fantastical meditation in which the terms of psychic combat are clear from the start. The message of *Love in the Time of Cholera* is that one must be determined to live—above all, to love—with fearless devotion to the very end, or else consign oneself to the ash-pits for those who have given up living before they are actually dead.

In the unnamed colonial city of this novel, whose action is set in the late-19th and early-20th centuries, the presence of death is so intense that it threatens to overwhelm any resistance life or love might offer. Nevertheless, on the very night when Dr. Urbino—the resident expert on the containment of cholera—dies in a horribly ludicrous accident, a certain Florentino Ariz tells his widow, Fermina Daza, that he has loved her for more than a half-century, ever since they were teen-aged sweethearts pledged to marry. Not unexpectedly, she is enraged; but as she lies awake that night, she finds herself thinking more about Florentino than about her dead husband.

The novel recounts the springtime passion of Florentino and Fermina: her blunt rejection of the poor youth; her marriage to the charming, urbane, wealthy doctor who does not love her and whom she does not love, but with whom she makes a conjugal life secure and tender though roiled by his adultery; Florentino's lifelong fidelity, which survives his obsessive tomcatting in pursuit of a sweet oblivion he never achieves; and Florentino and Fermina's renewed love at an age when most people are letting go of life rather than grasping it more tightly than ever.

Along the way, García Márquez details the variousness of human love with a Proustian, encyclopedic zest, sacrificing psychological penetration in favor of a tumult of erotic incident. There is not a lot of deep thinking going on in this novel: go at life with everything you have, García Márquez instructs his readers again and again, or die before your time. Yet despite the raw sentimentalism of the teaching, the story is so rich with hopefulness as to make one's misgivings seem rather small; in all, this is García Márquez's finest novel.

IT IS not this one, however, but the earlier and much more problematic *One Hundred Years of Solitude* on which rests not only García Márquez's worldwide fame but that of Macondo, the village mired in poverty, scorched by civil war, but bejeweled with magic. This novel, the saga of six generations of the Buendía family, cannot really be said to have a plot at all. One might call it a stationary picaresque—a congeries of erotic mischances, emotional grotesqueries, monumental ambitions, picturesque obsessions, flamboyant deaths, and supernatural visitations, all held together, insofar as it can be said to hold together, by the fateful consanguinity of the Buendías. These are the Latin American equivalents of Faulkner's Sartorises, Compsons, Sutpens, and Snopeses, rolled into a single lavish bundle of sages, madmen, religious zealots, fierce God-haters, moneygrubbers, sublime disinterested artists, jolly roisterers, and icy killers, and incidentally embodying all noble striving and all vicious degradation. In writing this book, García Márquez set out to amaze as no one else before or since, and amazement itself—at the wonder of natural and

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supernatural creation, and of human inventiveness—is one of the novel's principal themes.

What can one say of it? Readers everywhere adore this book; volumes of critical praise and loving exegesis are strewn like roses on its path through the groves of academe; yet few works of man enjoy such vast renown and deserve it so little. Rather than a compendium of life's uncountable riches, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the most smotheringly bookish of books, written by an author who has read all the wrong things and few of the right ones. In the end, García Márquez's imagination yields a bone-heap of political clichés, set amid a cavalcade of "marvels" whose power to astonish soon fizzles dismally on the page.

Take, for example, the military career of Colonel Aureliano Buendía, a veteran of 32 wars, each of which he started himself and each of which he lost. García Márquez's treatment of this character embodies every received idea about war and politics that has entered the liberal mind. Glory and honor, truth and right are—we learn—lethal chimeras that conceal the real reason why men fight and die, which is to gain power; tearing for years at each other's throats, men lay waste to their country and gain absolutely nothing; decades of obligatory inhumanity efface the only real life a good man ever has, which is to be found in family intimacy and tranquil work. And so forth: there is not a thought here that does not descend from Hemingway or Remarque or Céline or Graves or Sassoon or Ford Madox Ford or Virginia Woolf. Nor does García Márquez embody these hackneyed sentiments in vital or convincing action.

The same can be said of his canned indictment of the novel's vicious gringo banana imperialists and their native lackeys. The "banana bonanza" has transformed Macondo into a company town with a boot on its neck. When the workers rise up, the army turns its machine guns on the assembled strikers and mows down 3,000 men, women, and children. José Arcadio Segundo Buendía, having been tossed wounded and unconscious into a railroad boxcar, finally makes his way back to Macondo, only to find that no one there knows anything about any massacre; to relatives who go looking for the disappeared victims, the army officers blandly declare, "Nothing has happened in Macondo, nothing has ever happened, and nothing ever will happen. This is a happy town."

There might have been an actual massacre of striking plantation laborers in Aracataca in 1928, and then again there might not. In *Living to Tell the Tale*, García Márquez says he looked extensively into the question, only to "realize that the truth did not lie anywhere." Some—García Márquez calls them "conformists"—say there were no deaths at all, while others maintain that a hundred and more were killed and their bodies dumped into the sea. But a mere hundred dead are insufficient for García Márquez's purposes: he requires 3,000 "in order to preserve the epic proportions of the drama," which is to say, to bring refractory facts into line with his phantasmagoria of imperialist oppression. A man of lesser powers, and of less swollen ego, might have felt a qualm at the way his fiction supersedes the truth. But not García Márquez, who is the anointed master of Latin American reality.

And then there is García Márquez's celebrated magic realism. In the novel, when the banana potentates abandon Macondo under cover of darkness, it rains for four years, eleven months, and two days; this deluge evidently comes at the behest of one Mr. Brown, the head gringo, who is evidently as potent and as jealous as Jehovah. Other examples of magic realism in the novel are gypsies with magic lamps and flying carpets, flowers that rain from the sky to honor the dead, a child of incest born with a pig's tail. If the intention is to disclose the miraculous that lurks in the ordinary, the effect is frequently to spin a kind of literary cotton candy, laying on the spectacular coloration with a thick and cloying brush.

IN HIS new memoir, García Márquez recalls reading *The Arabian Nights* in adolescence: "I even dared to think," he writes, "that the marvels recounted by Scheherazade really happened in the daily life of her time, and stopped happening because of the incredulity and realistic cowardice of subsequent generations." It is highly unlikely he ever believed such a thing; but he may have wished he could. As Sir Richard Burton, whose 19th-century translation of *The Arabian Nights* remains the gold standard, rhapsodized, "Every man at some term or turn of his life has longed for the supernatural powers and a glimpse of Wonderland."

Perhaps the most famous of these stories is that of Aladdin, the slum-boy who acquires the magic lamp and along with it a genie who will grant his every wish. Only magic could effect such a transformation in Aladdin's fortune; no effort on his own part, however heroic, could have won him the hand of the Sultan's beautiful daughter and elevated him to a power in the land. This in short, is not Horatio Alger, rising in life by industry and brainpower; it is winning the cosmic lottery.

The magic here, exactly as in García Márquez, serves the pleasure of the terminally powerless, whose lives are subject to forces they can never hope to elude, much less to control. It is a fantasy that fulfills the same purpose as chewing coca leaves: it dulls the pain for a bit, while doing nothing to help anyone furnish a life of solidity or richness. Just so, although García Márquez purports to give a new epic resonance to the lives of the dispossessed and the overlooked, he succeeds only in perpetuating their most feckless dreams.

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This may help to explain why García Márquez's ostentatious hatred for the cruelties of dictatorial misrule has never extended to the dictator who has outlasted virtually the entire Latin American competition. To the contrary, García Márquez is the most noteworthy friend that Fidel Castro has.

In *Living to Tell the Tale*, Castro appears in Bogotá on the night of Gaitán's murder, inciting the troops to revolutionary heroism, dazzling in his passion. García Márquez did not actually see Fidel in action there, but he has truckled to the Maximum Leader ever since the latter's ascent to power in 1959. Last spring, during an especially harsh crackdown on Cuban dissidents, the American leftist Susan Sontag assailed García Márquez for keeping silent; García Márquez responded with sanctimonious unction that he could not count the number of Cuban dissidents he had helped, silently, to get out of prison or to emigrate over the past twenty years.

The riposte suggests that García Márquez is not entirely shameless. In response to it, though, the Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa rightly covered him in scorn, calling him a "courtesan" who has acceded to virtually every abomination the Cuban dictator has committed—in return for which service, Castro has been known to offer up the occasional political prisoner.

If the future of Latin America is to be significantly different from its desolate past, one suspects it will have to take both its literary and its moral bearings from the likes of Vargas Llosa rather than from the likes of García Márquez. In a 1983 essay entitled "Freedom for the Free?," Vargas Llosa reproached the German novelist Guenter Grass for saying that the only hope for Latin America was to follow "the example of Cuba." Grass's foolish call, Vargas Llosa conceded, may have had an understandable origin in the "spectacle, that is almost inconceivable for a Western European, of the iniquitous inequalities that disfigure our societies, the insensibility of our privileged classes, the exasperation one feels at seeing the slow death that the multitudes of the poor in our countries seem condemned to suffer and the savagery displayed by our military dictatorships." All the same, he insisted, only free men and democratic institutions could bring about the needed transformation.

Twenty-one years later, even as huge inequalities linger, democracy is the Latin American norm, and a decent future seems possible (if less so in Colombia than perhaps anywhere else). Small thanks for this are due to Gabriel García Márquez, who saw the terrible wound in the Latin American soul but could offer as a palliative only a shaman's incantations and socialist snake-oil. Should the Latin American ever prove a genuinely "new man," García Márquez's second-rate marvels will be seen for what they are: sideshow freaks to amaze gaping children, gaudy entertainments that dissolve at the touch of the real.

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Music

Fiddlers Three

Terry Teachout

Why is it that some musicians become famous and others are merely admired, even though they may be similarly gifted? Carl Flesch, a distinguished violin teacher who also had a solid but unspectacular career as a soloist, was intrigued by this question, about which he wrote at length in his posthumously published *Memoirs* (1957). After a lifetime of closely observing his better-known colleagues, Flesch concluded that the best ones were those who played with the "inner participation" of their personalities, and the ones who became most enduringly successful were those whose personalities were the most interesting.

This observation may sound obvious, even tautological, but in practice it turns out to be anything but that. In reflecting, for instance, on the career of Jascha Heifetz (1901-1987), the best-known violinist of the 20th century, Flesch put his finger on an aspect of Heifetz's playing that has long puzzled critics:

> People would forgive Heifetz his technical infallibility only if he made them forget it by putting his entire personality behind it. . . . He got used to playing often with his hands alone and allowing his mind a Sleeping Beauty's rest. When, however, [his mind] was roused by the Prince of inspiration, a work of art of the very first rank came into being. . . . When, on the other hand, he played without inner participation, then a marble statue, perfect but mercilessly cold, was the result.

Not only was Flesch an acute critic, he was also a shrewd amateur psychologist. Heifetz was in fact a deeply inhibited man, all but incapable of genuine intimacy, who concealed his interior turmoil behind an iron mask of stoicism. His playing, in which powerful emotions were kept on the shortest possible leash—as if he feared the consequences of giving them free rein—was the public manifestation of his equally rigid offstage personality.[1]

Heifetz's need for total control occasionally led him to settle for the "machine-tooled finish and empty elegance" that the composer-critic Virgil Thomson, in an oft-quoted 1940 review of one of his recitals, judged to be "more than just a trifle vulgar." But when his emotions were fully engaged, the results were fascinatingly personal, not least because of the contrast between his "hot" tone, produced with heavy bow pressure and heightened by an exceptionally fast vibrato, and the brisk, unsentimental tempos he invariably took, even in romantic music. The effect was underlined by his impassive platform demeanor, which seemed to contradict the intensity of his playing.[2]

Terry Teachout, Commentary's *regular music critic and the drama critic of the* Wall Street Journal, *writes about the arts at www.terryteachout.com.* A Terry Teachout Reader, *a collection of his essays about art and culture, will be published in May by Yale.*

[1] No full-length biography of Heifetz has yet been published, but Ayke Agus's *Heifetz as I Knew Him* (2001), a memoir by the woman who served as his accompanist and companion during the last fifteen years of his life, provides a vivid and plausible description of his tortured personality.

[2] Four of Heifetz's most compelling recordings are his 1935 version of the Sibelius Violin Concerto with Sir Thomas Beecham and the London Philharmonic, rightly cited by Flesch as "transcendental" (Naxos Historical 8.110938); the 1937 performance of the Franck A Major Sonata in which he is

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Artists with such complex personalities rarely fail to excite the imaginations of their listeners, and thus it is no surprise that Heifetz became and remained so famous. Nathan Milstein (1903-1992), by contrast, is now remembered mainly by a dwindling band of connoisseurs. Yet his career was major by any definition of the word, and he was, like Heifetz, one of the half-dozen greatest violinists to make recordings.

Indeed, the two men had much else in common—on paper. Both were Russian Jews who emigrated to the West after the Russian Revolution, eventually settling in the United States; both were pupils of Leopold Auer, the most noted violin teacher of his generation. Both had conservative tastes in repertoire, though they played some modern music (Milstein recorded Sergei Prokofiev's concertos and sonatas, while Heifetz commissioned concertos from Miklós Rózsa and William Walton). And both were highly "phonogenic" musicians whose recordings clearly suggest their essential artistic characters.

Yet Milstein, popular though he was, never became as big a celebrity as Heifetz, and the reason for this can be found in his personality. Unlike Heifetz, an introverted man with few passions outside of music, Milstein was both outgoing and wide-ranging in his cultural interests, and he embraced the act of public performance with an enthusiasm alien to Heifetz's tightly wound nature. A gifted raconteur, he produced an engagingly opinionated memoir, *From Russia to the West* (1990, co-written with Solomon Volkov), in which he described with frankness and charm his relationships with George Balanchine, Vladimir Horowitz, Fritz Kreisler, and Igor Stravinsky.

Milstein's playing mirrored his temperament. Virgil Thomson captured some of its distinctive features in a 1953 review of a Carnegie Hall recital:

> His tone is bright, his rhythm is alive and compelling. His music-making glows not with a surface luster but with an inner light and a warmth all its own, an animal warmth. Soul is not his specialty; nor are tears. . . . [H]e is still the perfect pupil, reasonable, master of his trade, devoted to the sound of his instrument, and not afraid of it. Neither is he afraid of the great classics nor of approaching them with passion and with common sense.

Milstein tempered his youthful ebullience in middle age, using his lean and focused tone to play the classics in a poised, patrician manner, not exactly restrained but not exhibitionistic, either. The adjective "aristocratic," often used to describe his mature style, is well suited to his forthright yet elegant recordings of the concertos of Mendelssohn (1961) and Tchaikovsky (1959). For many listeners, this one included, they are the definitive interpretations of these familiar masterpieces.[3]

Those who responded to Milstein's playing did so wholeheartedly, and there were more than enough of them for him to have a long and satisfying career. Still, he lacked, on the one hand, the enlivening touch of vulgarity—the common touch—that helps bridge the psychological gap between artist and audience. Nor, on the other hand, was his personality cloven by the kind of sharp fissure that made Heifetz so charismatic. Hence he is now known to a coterie of aging fans rather than to the musical public at large.

Even less well remembered is the American violinist Louis Kaufman (1905-1994), whose entry in the second edition of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* is only one paragraph long. Yet Kaufman's playing has been heard by far more people than that of Heifetz and Milstein put together—though few of them know his name.

From the 1930's through the 1950's, Kaufman was one of Hollywood's top studio musicians. He played the violin solos on the soundtrack of *Gone With the Wind*, scored by Max Steiner, and was the concertmaster for the orchestras that recorded such other important film scores as Aaron Copland's *Our Town*, *The Heiress*, and *The Red Pony*; Hugo Friedhofer's *The Best Years of Our Lives*; Bernard Herrmann's *Vertigo* and *Psycho*; Erich Wolfgang Korngold's *Adventures of Robin Hood* and *Kings Row*; David Raksin's *Laura*; Miklós Rózsa's *Double Indemnity* and *Ben-Hur*; and Franz Waxman's *Sunset Boulevard*.

Kaufman's commitment to Hollywood put strict limits on his concertizing, and he made comparatively few solo appearances until the 50's, when he scaled back his studio work. Yet he still managed to write himself into the history of classical music by making the first commercial recording of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* in 1947, and his later performances of Vivaldi's other concertos played a prominent role in the post-war baroque revival. In addition, he was deeply committed to modern music, performing and recording

suavely partnered by Arthur Rubinstein (RCA Red Seal 09026-63007-2); a 1950 performance of the Brahms D Minor Sonata, Op. 108, brilliantly accompanied by the American pianist William Kapell (RCA Red Seal 09026-68996-2); and the 1956 premiere recording of Miklós Rózsa's Violin Concerto, commissioned by Heifetz (RCA Gold Seal 09026-61752-2). All of these recordings, as well as those mentioned below, can be purchased online by viewing this article during the month of April on Commentary's website, www.commentarymagazine.com.

[3] The Mendelssohn, accompanied by Leon Barzin and the Philharmonia Orchestra, has been reissued on an imported budget CD (EMI Classics CD-CFP 4374). The Tchaikovsky, accompanied by William Steinberg and the Pittsburgh Orchestra, is part of *The Art of Nathan Milstein* (EMI Classics ZDMF 0777 7 64830 2 3), a six-CD boxed set that also includes concertos by Beethoven, Brahms, Dvořák, Glazunov, Saint-Saëns, and Prokofiev; sonatas by Beethoven, Handel, Mozart, and Prokofiev; and a selection of encore pieces. Of comparable interest is his 1974 set of the Bach sonatas and partitas (DGG 457 701-2GOR2, two CD's). *From Russia to the West* is currently out of print.

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with such leading 20th-century composers as Aaron Copland, Darius Milhaud, and Francis Poulenc; from the 40's onward, he recorded extensively.

Why, then, is Kaufman all but forgotten? Because he spent his peak years laboring anonymously in the Hollywood studios instead of performing in major American cities. As a result, he failed to win the critical acclaim that a violinist of his quality might reasonably have expected to receive. Virtually all of his commercial recordings (including his historic *Four Seasons*) were made for small independent labels and have long been out of print. And his adventurous musical tastes drew him away from the standard repertoire that is the bread and butter of every classical-music soloist who hopes to have an international concert career.

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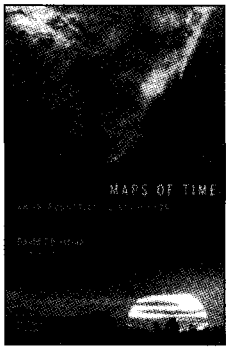

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In recent months, though, Kaufman has finally made his way into the spotlight. He left behind at his death a delightful memoir, *A Fiddler's Tale: How Hollywood and Vivaldi Discovered Me*, co-written with Annette Kaufman, his wife and accompanist, and published last year to excellent reviews.[4] Bound into each copy of *A Fiddler's Tale* is a CD containing performances by Kaufman of Milhaud's *Concertino de Printemps*, Saint-Saëns's *Havanaise*, a Vivaldi concerto, and shorter pieces by Copland, Korngold, Robert Russell Bennett, and the black composer William Grant Still (whose music Kaufman championed), plus solo transcriptions of two songs by Jerome Kern, "The Song Is You" and "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes." Thanks to this CD, it is now possible for listeners who know nothing of Louis Kaufman other than his Hollywood work to hear for the first time his superb classical playing.

Kaufman also figures prominently in an exhibition at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. called *Discovering Milton Avery*.[5] An art lover whose well-compensated Hollywood career eventually made it possible for him to collect on a small scale, Kaufman was the first person ever to buy a painting from Avery. (He paid $25 for it in 1926, about $250 in today's dollars.) Over the years he acquired three dozen more paintings, drawings, and prints by his friend, who later came to be recognized as one of the leading American artists of the 20th century. All of the works Kaufman owned are now hanging at the Phillips, together with fourteen other Avery paintings and works on paper owned by Duncan Phillips, founder of the Phillips Collection, the first museum to acquire Avery's work and (later) to collect him in depth.

Louis Kaufman, it turns out, was something of a renaissance man: a keen-eyed art collector, a stalwart advocate of modern music, even an accomplished memoirist. As the CD accompanying *A Fiddler's Tale* reveals, he was also a violinist of high quality, sweet-toned and technically fastidious. But he lacked the single-minded drive that turns gifted instrumentalists into full-time soloists, and he did not have the larger-than-life personality that makes a few of them celebrities. Despite its exemplary musicality, his playing was not quite individual enough to impose itself on the consciousness of concertgoers. In the end, he was too self-effacing to be a star.

Yet if Kaufman was troubled by his failure to become famous, he gives no hint of it in his autobiography, whose charm and verve, like that of Nathan Milstein's *From Russia to the West*, are clearly an outward sign of its author's inner contentment. The epigraph to the fifth chapter of *A Fiddler's Tale* comes from the *Bhagavad-Gita*: "He who really does what he should will obtain what he wants." Those are the words of a man at ease in his own skin, as was the remark that Kaufman often made to his wife as they prepared for bed: "This was a great day and tomorrow will be fine too."

The world would be infinitely poorer without such untroubled, unselfconscious craftsmen as Louis Kaufman and Nathan Milstein. Theirs is an exalted place in the kingdom of music, and it is good to be reminded of their angst-free achievements—as *A Fiddler's Tale* and *Discovering Milton Avery* do remind us. Yet for all the lasting pleasure their work gives, it is the Jascha Heifetzes who loom largest in our thoughts, and no doubt always will. In the realm of art, all things being equal, most people find unhappiness more interesting than joy.

[4] University of Wisconsin Press, 462 pp., $26.95.

[5] The full title is *Discovering Milton Avery: Two Devoted Collectors, Louis Kaufman and Duncan Phillips*. It is on display at the Phillips through May 16.

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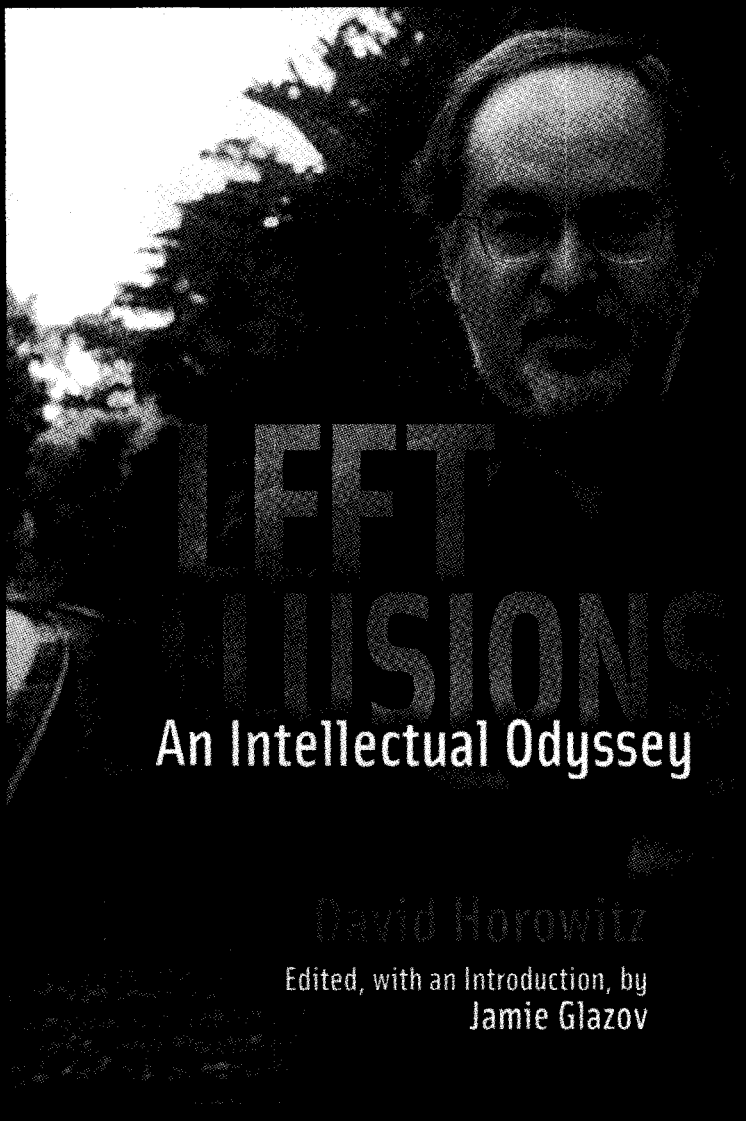

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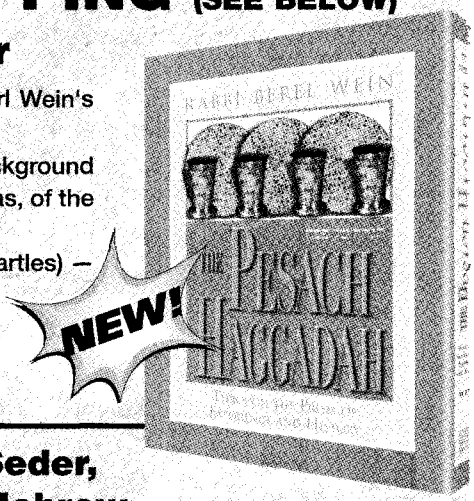

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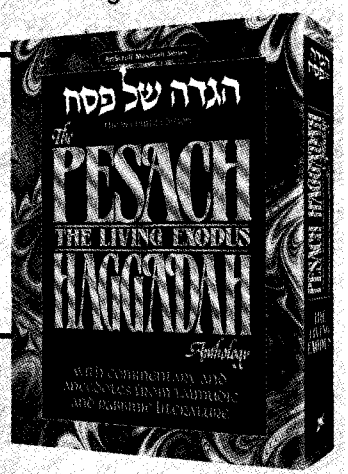

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Books in Review

For the Record

Bush Country:
How Dubya Became a
Great President While
Driving Liberals Insane
by John Podhoretz
St. Martin's. 266 pp. $24.95

Reviewed by
Josh Chafetz

IF YOU ever have an urge to be stared at in confusion, condescension, and contempt, try sitting in a coffee shop in Oxford, England, reading a book entitled *Bush Country: How Dubya Became a Great President While Driving Liberals Insane*. But then, John Podhoretz—a *New York Post* columnist and commentator on Fox News—undoubtedly expected to provoke precisely this sort of reaction in certain quarters. To complicate matters, he admits that he, too, was once far from enamored of George W. Bush. But he changed his mind, and in laying out the case for Bush's greatness, he also explains the reasons why.

The nine main chapters of *Bush Country* are devoted to narrating the evolution of Bush's policies and defending the President's governing style, all in an effort to show that the current administration has "constructed one of the most consequential presidencies in the nation's history." Interspersed with these chapters are others in which Podhoretz responds to eight "Crazy Liberal Ideas" about the President—the ideas, that is, that he is a moron, a puppet, a liar, a Hitler, and so forth. Throughout, Podhoretz's tone is measured and equable, and he takes his intellectual opponents with due seriousness, quoting from and responding patiently to critiques of the President's record from the *New Republic*, the *Nation*, and elsewhere.

Podhoretz's book will be immensely useful to Bush supporters in search of detailed answers to liberal criticisms. If, for example, someone (some Democratic presidential hopeful, perhaps?) should claim that Bush is out to slash funding for domestic programs, here is Podhoretz with a chapter-and-verse recitation of how overall domestic spending has risen 21 percent during Bush's time in office, an amount that includes significant increases in spending on education, energy, health and human services, and labor—and that is even before the new prescription-drug plan has been factored in. The President's September 2003 statement—"when somebody hurts, government has got to move"—is hardly the stuff of an implacable foe of the New Deal.

Similarly, if someone should complain about Bush's defects as a global citizen, here comes Podhoretz pointing to the President's $15-billion plan to fight AIDS in Africa and the Caribbean, a program inaugurated in April 2003 with the announcement that, "When we see the wounded traveler on the road to Jericho, we will not, America will not, pass to the other side of the road." By using such biblically charged language, Podhoretz comments, Bush "was explicitly framing his new AIDS initiative as an act of Christian charity," thereby warning some on the Christian Right not to oppose the plan simply because they found some elements of it distasteful.

JOSH CHAFETZ *is a graduate student in politics at Merton College, Oxford, and co-editor of oxblog.com.*

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Podhoretz sees the AIDS initiative, indeed, as one more proof of the distance that separates Bush from your garden-variety "orthodox conservative." "For the past forty years," he writes, "conservatives have made the argument that, yes, America is indeed a 'great nation,' but that its government could not really do great things." By contrast, the President's vision is of an America projecting its greatness and magnanimity throughout the world.

THAT VISION applies not only to malignant threats like AIDS but also, most obviously and most strikingly, to malevolent ones like terrorism. (I owe the useful distinction between malignant and malevolent threats to R. James Woolsey and Rachel Kleinfeld Belton.) That is why Podhoretz spends the lion's share of his book not on domestic matters but on explicating and defending Bush's decisions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Following 9/11, Bush was faced with two pathways: in Podhoretz's words, either "the United States goes into a state of lockdown" or "[w]e change the conditions outside." Bush chose the latter course by announcing the Bush Doctrine: those who harbored terrorists would be treated as terrorists. More than that, 9/11 made clear that despotic regimes likely to ally themselves with terrorist groups could not be permitted to acquire weapons of mass destruction. As Bush put it in the 2002 State of the Union Address, "I will not wait on events while dangers gather. . . . The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons." This was the basis of the much-maligned but absolutely necessary doctrine of preemption, which the administration laid out in detail in the National Security Strategy released in September 2002.

Bush also had a theory about the causes of terrorism—namely, despotism and oppression—and what to do about them. His solution, in Podhoretz's telling, was the most radical aspect of his presidency, and entailed perhaps the most radical foreign-policy vision of any American President in history: liberal democracy should be made to take root around the world, including in the Middle East. In brief, providing for American national security and promoting liberal, tolerant, democratic ideas around the world are two sides of the same coin.

Finally, malignant threats and malevolent threats are themselves related. After 9/11, Podhoretz writes, it "began to be understood that if political instability in Africa led to a corresponding rise in Islamic fundamentalism and militancy—especially in oil-rich Nigeria—the consequences could be dire." If despotism and oppression feed terrorism, so do famine and plague. In this sense, fighting AIDS in Africa and fighting al Qaeda in Afghanistan can be seen as, essentially, the same fight.

IT IS no slight to Podhoretz's extremely well-argued book to say that it will have its greatest effect on those already inclined to favor the President's policies. The disturbingly large number of people who freely admit to hating him are unlikely to be convinced, and the same can be safely assumed of those who believe that the President really is the puppet of a neoconservative cabal, or that he lied to the nation in order to take us to war. (To this last point, Podhoretz rejoins emphatically that Bush may have spun the intelligence, but he did not lie about it.)

Even admirers of Bush may feel that, at times, Podhoretz allows himself to get carried away, as when he asserts (invoking his authority as a former presidential speechwriter) that "Bush is the best presidential speaker since Franklin Delano Roosevelt." And there are also a few curious omissions. As the *New Republic*'s Gregg Easterbrook—hardly a Bush partisan—has repeatedly observed, the President's environmental record is actually a good one, and has been unfairly derided by his political opponents. Yet aside from noting that the Kyoto Protocol was dead long before Bush delivered its eulogy in 2001, Podhoretz avoids discussing the subject. Similarly, apart from a single, unfortunately worded allusion to a Democratic "jihad against several Bush judicial nominees," he has nothing to say about judicial politics, which proved so important in the 2002 midterm elections and is a subject of substantial conservative ire.

But domestic policy is also finally beside the point. Bush is a President defined by war, and, as Podhoretz writes, "at a time when every sensible person in this country understands that we are in the crosshairs of mass murderers, only the blind and the desperate and the parochial" could continue to think of disputes over Medicare and oil-drilling in Alaska as having "world-altering significance." And it is in its discussion of the war that Podhoretz's book truly shines.

He does a superb job—a much better job than the administration itself has done—explaining how Iraq fits into the broader war on terror. He sees clearly that we are faced with an enemy whose "intent is to kill on an unimaginable scale, to tear at the heart of this country, to cripple us emotionally and scar us psychically in ways from which we could never recover." And he understands that defeating this kind of enemy requires a new strategic doctrine and a new way of understanding our relationship with other nations.

Bush understands these things, too, or, if you like, he instinctively recognizes and has acted upon them. If he is to go down in history as the great President that John Podhoretz thinks he is, he will need a second term to finish the job he has embarked upon. To do that, he

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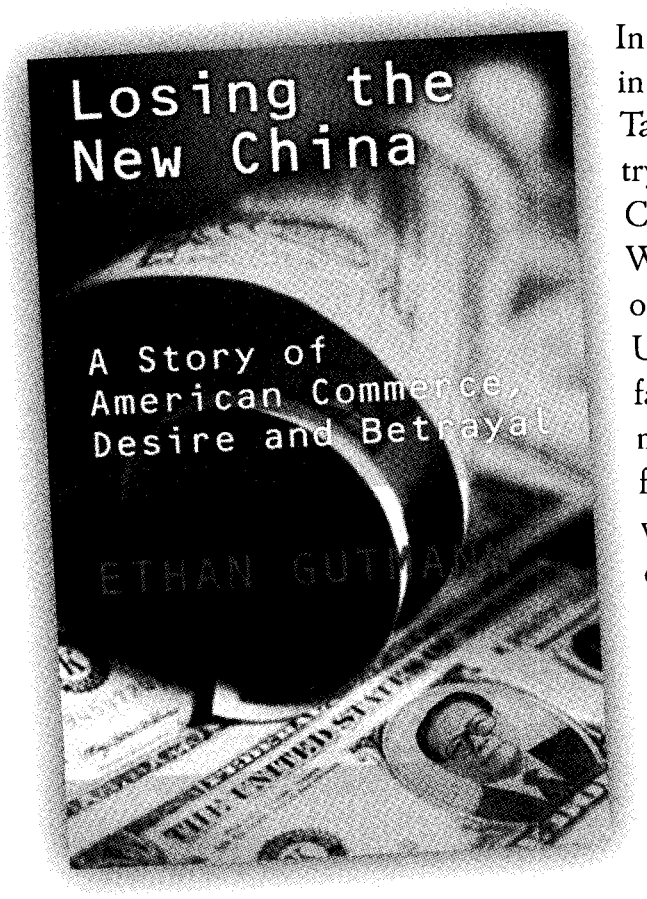

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and his team will have to become better at explaining the significance of his policies; to do *that*, he and they would be well advised to absorb the lessons of this brief, engaging, and very impressive book.

Lost Innocence

Alger Hiss's Looking Glass Wars: The Covert Life of a Soviet Spy

by G. Edward White

Oxford. 286 pp. $30.00

Reviewed by
Mark Falcoff

IN 1948, Whittaker Chambers, an erstwhile Communist-party member and Soviet spy, came forward to accuse Alger Hiss, a former State Department official, of having been a partner in espionage on behalf of Moscow during the 1930's and 40's. The charge stunned official Washington and indeed the entire United States.

At the time, Hiss was the suave, even elegant, president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in New York and a pillar of the American foreign-policy establishment. Chambers was an uncomely and virtually unknown journalist. Yet at a trial two years later, the evidence persuaded a jury to believe Chambers; Hiss, the former State Department "golden boy," was convicted of perjury and sentenced to confinement for 44 months in the U.S. correctional facility at Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. (The only reason Hiss could not be tried on the more serious charge of espionage was that the statute of limitations had expired.)

MARK FALCOFF *is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.*

Hiss died in 1996, having devoted the remainder of his life following his discharge from prison to a campaign for vindication. In one obvious sense, that campaign failed: across four decades, not only was Hiss unable to produce a single piece of evidence counteracting Chambers's testimony, but in three successive attempts he was also unable to persuade higher courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, to overturn his conviction.

But in another sense, Hiss's campaign succeeded quite brilliantly. The fruits included restoration of his government pension and his reinstatement as a member of the Massachusetts bar, the applause of adoring audiences on American university campuses, the creation of a chair in his honor at Bard College, and a mini-industry of magazine articles and books by authors eager to proclaim his innocence. In time, many patriotic, sensible Americans became convinced that Hiss had been the victim of a frame-up, and many more were persuaded, at the very least, to doubt the foundations of the government's case.

HOW DID Hiss achieve this sleight of hand? That is the question addressed by G. Edward White in *Alger Hiss's Looking Glass Wars*. Himself a distinguished legal scholar at the University of Virginia law school, White is also the son-in-law of an attorney who participated in Hiss's defense at one of his two trials (the first concluded with a hung jury). He also reveals himself to be an accomplished historian of American political culture, with the Hiss case serving as a kind of arc along which he charts the evolution of elite attitudes toward Communism, the cold war, the FBI, and Richard Nixon, who as a freshman Congressman played a key role in bringing Chambers forward to tell his story.

In many ways, White's book advances the work of three previous studies—Allen Weinstein's *Perjury* (1978), Sam Tanenhaus's *Whittaker Chambers: A Life* (1997), and most recently, John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr's *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* (1999). But it also goes further.

White begins with a careful and somewhat skeptical investigation into Hiss's background. This was far less genteel than the diplomat-spy would have others believe. Even as a young man, White shows, Hiss knew how to deceive and manipulate, partly through immense charm, partly through a remarkable degree of self-possession that translated into a formidable power of intimidation.

Despite his less than royal roots, Hiss's professional ascent was dazzling. After graduating from Johns Hopkins and Harvard law school, where he became a protégé of Professor (later Justice) Felix Frankfurter, Hiss served for a time as secretary to former Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, went to New Deal Washington to serve in the Agricultural Adjustment Agency, and then worked as an aide to Senator Gerald Nye, who conducted a sensational (or rather, sensationalistic) investigation of U.S. armament manufacturers. He finally moved to the State Department, eventually rising to become a key aide to FDR's Secretary of State, Edward Stettinius.

Hiss was at Yalta with Roosevelt and at the San Francisco founding conference of the United Nations. He was openly being spoken of as a future American Secretary of State. Yet, in 1946, he quietly left the government for the Carnegie Endowment in order to avoid confronting certain rumors and suspicions that had floated to the surface following a number of defections from the Soviet spy network. Had Whittaker Chambers held his tongue, Hiss would in all likelihood have ended his career unblemished and full of honors.

WHAT CHAMBERS exposed was that, during all these years, Hiss had been leading a double life. In 1930

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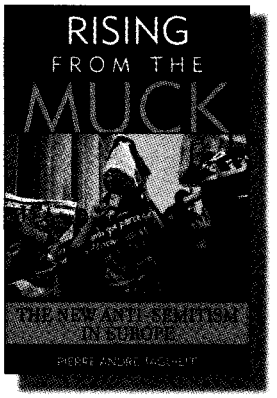

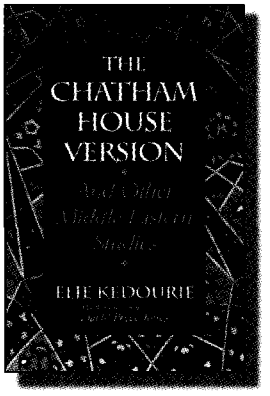

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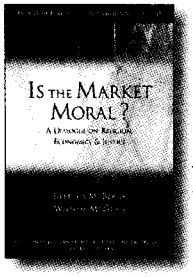

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he had married Priscilla Fansler, a divorcée with a young son who was herself already knee-deep in radical politics. In 1933 or 1934 he joined the so-called Ware group, a cenacle of government officials who were secret members of the American Communist party. At about the same time that he moved over to the State Department, the Hisses formed a close family friendship with Chambers and his wife, a link solidified by their joint participation in espionage.

When Chambers decided to break with the party and the Soviets in 1938, he begged Hiss to join him; the latter refused. Ten years down the road, Chambers surfaced as Hiss's accuser, and was able to produce copies of classified government documents that he had retained. These proved to have been typed on a machine known to be owned by the Hiss family. Hiss was never satisfactorily able to explain away this evidence; in many ways he never tried. Rather, as White writes:

> He simply denied any Soviet affiliations, and asked the House Un-American Activities Committee whom they were inclined to believe, a highly credentialed government official with an impressive demeanor, or a fat, rumpled ex-Communist with bad teeth. His reputational defense required him to assume the posture of an outraged innocent, scapegoated by an unstable accuser for personal and political reasons. That was the posture he was to adopt for the rest of his life.

Upon his release from prison in 1954, Hiss resumed this line of attack—against the advice of many of his friends and even against the will of his wife Priscilla. (The two eventually separated over this issue). At first, he did not find many takers for his version of events—which is not to say, however, that he found none.

Ironically, his enemies helped him. In the late 1940's, some Republican politicians seized upon the Hiss case as evidence not just that the apparatus of the New Deal had been rife with Soviet agents but that the Roosevelt administration itself was something close to a Communist plot from the start. Hiss thus benefited indirectly from extremism on the Right; he *had* to be innocent so that his accusers could be wrong about larger issues. It was in this context that even certified anti-Communists like Dean Acheson proved willing to step up to the plate on Hiss's behalf.

Still, throughout the era when cold-war liberalism in the U.S. remained intact, Hiss's campaign of vindication did not gain much traction. The big change came with the Vietnam war and Watergate. The former discredited anti-Communism among American liberals and to a large degree among a generation of American students, particularly at elite universities; the latter taught a broader swath of the population to distrust government in general and President Richard Nixon in particular, the man who had been Hiss's chief congressional accuser two decades earlier.

More significantly, as White emphasizes, the cultural mood in the United States in the 1970's was one in which the line between liberalism, Left-liberalism, fellow-traveling, and frank sympathy for foreign Communist governments became utterly blurred. In this environment, Hiss could be portrayed as innocent without raising the embarrassing question of why it was that so many of his supporters were people who would not have been the slightest bit troubled if in fact he *had* been guilty of espionage on behalf of the USSR.

WHITE'S RECONSTRUCTION also helps clarify how Hiss was able to sidestep or surmount several crucial setbacks along the way. In the early 1970's, he granted full access to the files on his case to Allen Weinstein, then a little-known professor of American history at Smith Col-

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lege. Weinstein was initially seeking to establish Hiss's innocence, but the FBI files that he obtained via the Freedom of Information Act, combined with the files of Hiss's own defense team and the willingness of former Communist-party members and confessed espionage agents to corroborate Chambers's version of the facts, forced the historian to revise his original presumption. When he informed Hiss that he could no longer stick with his original thesis—indeed, as a serious scholar he had no choice but to sustain Hiss's guilt—the latter responded: "I always knew you were prejudiced against me." With characteristic hauteur, Hiss would subsequently dismiss Weinstein as "a small-time professor for a small college trying to get to the big time through me."

Weinstein's involvement with Hiss constitutes an entire chapter of this book, and makes chilling reading. Far from pushing Weinstein aside, Hiss covertly mobilized an entire battery of left-wing ideologues, led by Victor Navasky of the *Nation*, to attack his standing as a historian and if possible to destroy his career. Weinstein, still somewhat inexperienced in this sort of warfare, was slow to grasp what was happening, and responded in ways that seemed to undermine his case. Nonetheless, his book remains to this day a landmark study, and its findings have only been enriched by information about Soviet espionage that has come to light in the quarter-century since it was first published.

The next round was fought in Moscow, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. John Lowenthal, a lawyer, filmmaker, and left-wing activist, succeeded in getting General Dmitri A. Volkogonov, a high-ranking Soviet intelligence officer, to declare before cameras that he had searched the KGB archives and found no evidence of Hiss's ever having been a Soviet agent. When pressed, however, Volkogonov admitted that he had scanned the massive KGB archive for only two days; nor was it surprising that he had failed to find anything—as White explains, Chambers and Hiss had worked for the GRU, a completely different agency under the control of the Soviet military. Volkogonov, indeed, subsequently retracted his statements, avowing that Lowenthal had "pushed me hard to say things of which I was not fully convinced." But the retraction had little impact: none of the television networks that reported his "exoneration" of Hiss took note of his subsequent change of mind.

The final round took place in Washington, in the late 1990's, when the National Security Agency finally released the Venona decrypts, transcripts of intercepted communications from Soviet intelligence operatives in the United States from 1942 to 1946. Among those identified as having a covert relationship with the Soviets was Alger Hiss. The information in these decrypts meshed perfectly with three other sources. All converged in establishing that Alger Hiss had been an agent for Soviet military intelligence in 1945, and that he had been an agent since at least 1937.

Moscow's talent spotters had not erred. Were it not for the defections from their ranks in the 1940's that first brought Hiss under suspicion, they might well have succeeded in lodging one of their valued agents in the position of U.S. Secretary of State, at a crucial moment of the cold war.

Where are we left, then? The facts of the Hiss case remain unaltered. Still, in some significant quarters of the political culture, the myth of Alger Hiss's innocence persists. The reception accorded to G. Edward White's remarkable account of how that myth was created may tell us whether one of the longest running skirmishes in our culture wars has finally come to an end.

MY RIGHTEOUS GENTILE

Lord Wedgwood and Other Memories

Gabriella Auspitz Labson

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This memoir has two protagonists: Josiah Wedgwood, M.P.,Christian Zionist, and the author herself, whose spirit shines from its pages.

In the 1920's, Wedgwood visited her town in democratic Czechoslovakia to preach Zionism. Gabriella was chosen to present a bouquet of flowers, and, after Munich, she appealed for his help. He sent visas for Britain, saving her life and her brother's.

They met again, in 1941, when Wedgwood came to alert America to the Nazi peril. He feared that Britain would do little to save Hitler's victims; and when the *Struma* sank, Wedgwood, now a peer, stunned the House of Lords with his hope that those responsible would be "hanged high as Haman."

As they both feared, victory came too late. Gabriella's family died at Auschwitz, and she dedicated herself to the survival of the Jewish people, through education, here and in Israel.

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Nazis & Good Neighbors
THE UNITED STATES CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE GERMANS OF LATIN AMERICA IN WORLD WAR II

Max Paul Friedman

"A stunning piece of historical sleuth work. This beautifully researched and compellingly argued account of the U.S. pursuit of German nationals in Latin America—written with the page-turning energy of a detective novel—opens a new window onto WWII-era policy of the U.S. toward its southern neighbors."
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100 Best Books for Children
by Anita Silvey
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Reviewed by
Joseph Bottum

THERE IS reading for fun. There is reading for instruction. There is reading to fill the rainy afternoons that seemed, in childhood, to stretch through long, gray miles of indoor tedium. And then there is a different kind of reading that children sometimes do: reading to console, reading to escape, reading to manage the huge, unmanageable waves of childhood itself—reading, as the desperate, unhappy boy in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* puts it, "as if for life."

What Dickens knew about the bookish child seems to escape many of today's compilers of bibliographies and recommended-reading lists for children. Not that this deters publishers from the enterprise. An hour's browsing online will find in print over a hundred general surveys of children's books, with five new ones published just in the last months. And that is to say nothing of the dozens of specialized studies that have recently appeared, or the innumerable new anthologies of standard children's stories that every season seems to bring. Forget reading enough children's books to choose the best works for your children. The anxious parent cannot even read all the books *about* children's books.

But if you must pick one, Anita Silvey's *100 Best Books for Children* is not a bad choice. It presents small essays, a page or so long, about each of the author's 100-best selections, together with an appended list of perhaps another 300 titles. Refusing to rank the books she has chosen, Silvey parcels them into age-group divisions for children from two to twelve, with the authors listed alphabetically within each division. There is little that is opinionated or annoying in her selections; neither is there much surprising or exciting.

That is perhaps as it should be, for Silvey, as a former editor at the *Horn Book* magazine and a publisher of children's books for Houghton Mifflin, is practically the definition of the sensible mainstream. And what the sensible mainstream wants your children to read these days is, on the whole, quite fine. Who could object—who could *want* to object—to a picture book like Virginia Lee Burton's *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel*? Or Else Holmelund Minarik's *Little Bear*, with the drawings that first made Maurice Sendak famous? Or Marguerite Henry's bestselling horse story *Misty of Chincoteague* (although the fascination of young girls with ponies is not something I, as a father, like to think about too deeply)? David McCord is generally considered the best modern writer of children's verse, but no one can really complain about Silvey's choice of Jack Prelutsky's "My dog, he is a greedy dog, / he eats enough for three, / his belly bulges to the ground, / he is the dog for me."

True, Silvey cannot quite bring herself to recommend such 18th-century classics as *Gulliver's Travels* (even in modern versions edited to remove the bawdiness) and *Robinson Crusoe* (even in modern versions edited to remove the religiousness). But she does not let her preference for the recent overcome her good taste. She has an unvarying predilection for characters best described as charming, whenever they first appeared in literature: the twelve little girls in two straight lines in Ludwig Bemelmans's 1939 *Madeline*, for young readers; Ratty and Mole in Kenneth Grahame's 1908 *The Wind in the Willows*, for her middle group; and Bilbo Baggins in J.R.R. Tol-

JOSEPH BOTTUM *is Books & Arts editor of the* Weekly Standard *and the author of* The Fall & Other Poems.

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kien's 1938 *The Hobbit*, for the older crowd.

Any children's bibliography published nowadays contains at least a smidgen of multiculturalist sensitivity, and Silvey's is no exception. She apologizes twice for the pidgin English spoken by a Chinese character in George Selden's *The Cricket in Times Square*, for instance, and her praise of Mildred Taylor's 1976 *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* shows that she resists acknowledging one of the key rules of modern children's literature. This is that older books set in American subcultures—like Kathryn Forbes's 1943 *Mama's Bank Account*, about Norwegian immigrants in California, or Sydney Taylor's 1951 *All-of-a-Kind Family*, about a Jewish neighborhood in New York—are always better than anything written after 1970, when the resentments of race, class, and gender silted down even into children's books.

There is, however, less political correctness in *100 Best Books for Children* than one might expect. In her essay on P.L. Travers's *Mary Poppins*, Silvey casually observes that all-trumping feminism and relentless multiculturalism were features more typical of children's publishing in the 1970's and 1980's than today. *100 Best Books for Children* recommends nothing like *Heather Has Two Mommies*, and only one of Judy Blume's resentful and sex-charged books makes even Silvey's secondary list. Indeed, the fading of Blume as a canonical children's author is one of the few triumphs of recent publishing.

Along the way, Silvey occasionally falters, as when she insists that *Winnie-the-Pooh* belongs at the same reading level as *Anne of Green Gables*, or when she recommends Brian Jacques's *Redwall*, a derivative and overlong animal fantasy about medieval mice. The success of the movie version is all that can make Dick King-Smith's *Babe: The Gallant Pig* seem better than his parrot story, *Harry's Mad*, and only a desire to have more books about girls on the list can explain why Jean Craighead George's Eskimo story *Julie of the Wolves* gets the nod instead of her *My Side of the Mountain*, a strange, dark book about a boy wintering in the New England hills while training a falcon.

Much of this is a matter of individual taste, of course, but while I am complaining, how can *Little Women* and *The Railway Children* and *The Wizard of Oz* and *The Jungle Book* and *Treasure Island* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* not make the top 100 on anyone's list? How can the boating children in Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* go missing even from Silvey's extended appendix? Or the two girls let loose on the streets of New York in Nora Johnson's *The World of Henry Orient*? Or the eccentric English family on a Greek island in Gerald Durrell's *My Family and Other Animals*?

Finally, *100 Best Books for Children* manifests a palpable fear of religion, carefully explaining how Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* and C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* succeed *despite* their theological elements. No straightforward religious classic, from John Bunyan's 1678 *Pilgrim's Progress* to James Agee's 1951 *The Morning Watch*, makes either of Silvey's lists. Neither, for that matter, do any of the famous 19th- and early-20th-century girls' books, all of them doused in explicit Christianity, from the high British Anglicanism of Charlotte Yonge's *The Daisy Chain* to the low American Presbyterianism of Eleanor Porter's *Pollyanna*.

Still, parents at a loss after buying the latest installment of *Harry Potter* will find in Silvey's *100 Best Books for Children*—as they will in almost any among a dozen other such guides—a perfectly reasonable list of happy and healthy books to get for their children. I am just not sure that happy and healthy books, as un-

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derstood by proper psychologists of childhood, are genuinely conducive to real happiness in either children or the adults they must become.

Certainly the hungry child will find too many of today's standards awfully thin gruel. It is worth remembering that Dickens's reading list for the eight- or nine-year-old David Copperfield includes Smollett's *Humphrey Clinker*, Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and Cervantes' *Don Quixote*—any one of which would make a well-qualified recommender of children's books these days fall to the ground in a Victorian swoon. As Louisa May Alcott's 1868 *Little Women* opens, the March girls have just read Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*, which is not a title likely to be mentioned in children's bibliographies any longer.

Back in 1916, Dorothy Canfield Fisher published a nearly forgotten anti-progressive classic called *Understood Betsy*, about a little girl so perfectly fathomed and so expertly cosseted by her psychologically trained guardians that only a year spent running loose and unsupervised on a farm can save her from a nervous breakdown. Every boy and girl who has been passed through Silvey's sensible and respectable guide to children's books is under threat of being made into an Understood Child. The works she recommends are uniformly good and worthy, but somehow, in sum, they lack a sense of the mythopoeic, and the uncontrolled, and the unmanageable, and the desperate. They lack a sense of childhood.

"My father had left a small collection of books in a little room upstairs," David Copperfield remembers. "They kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time. . . . When I think of it, the picture always rises in my mind, of a summer evening, the boys at play in the churchyard, and I sitting on my bed, reading as if for life."

Beyond Moscow

Black Earth:
A Journey Through Russia After the Fall
by Andrew Meier
Norton. 512 pp. $28.95

Reviewed by
Sean McMeekin

THE COLLAPSE of the USSR in 1991 brought with it the demise of the discipline of Sovietology. With cold-war-era subsidies from Washington running dry, specialists in Soviet affairs faced a bitter struggle to justify the continued relevance of their field. Many young scholars gave up the ghost, switching to more fashionable subjects or leaving the Ivory Tower altogether.

Into this intellectual void rushed a generation of freelancers, who made up for their lack of academic training with sharp eyes for journalistic detail. David Remnick's *Lenin's Tomb* (1993) and *Resurrection* (1997) dramatized Russia's painful transition from Communism, while Stephen Handelman's *Comrade Criminal* (1995) set the standard for studies of the Russian mafia.

Andrew Meier, a friend of Remnick's who reported on Russia for *Time* from 1996 to 2001, now aims to take the genre to a higher level. *Black Earth* distills much of Meier's reporting in the ambitious format of a literary travelogue. Although the scenes it describes took place over some six years, the narrative flows smoothly, as if we were touring Russia with the author in real time.

Meier's journey begins and ends in Moscow, the seat of both financial and political power in the new Russia. From Moscow, he sets out for Russia's extremes, heading south

SEAN MCMEEKIN, *a new contributor, teaches Russian studies at Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey. His book,* The Red Millionaire, *a political biography of Willy Münzenberg, has just been published by Yale.*

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to strife-ridden Chechnya, north to Norilsk, the world's northernmost large city, east to Sakhalin island off the Pacific coastline, and west to Peter the Great's imperial capital on the Gulf of Finland. The distances covered are so vast that Meier usually travels by plane, braving Aeroflot and its underfinanced offshoots. Once he arrives in the provinces, though, he generally explores by "vulture" taxi, hitching a ride, for a price, with locals. This allows him to obtain first-hand impressions of regions seldom visited by foreign reporters.

Chechnya, Meier's first stop, is not exactly a tourist destination. Kidnapping emerged as the most profitable industry in the province's brief period of independence between 1996 and 1999, when the Chechens made, in Meier's judgment, "a dismally poor effort at self-rule." The era was marked by the imposition of the Wahhabi brand of Islamic law "in its bloodiest form," with young Chechen fighters aided by mercenaries and money from Saudi Arabia.

Rebel recruitment was further fueled by the Russians' brutal "cleansing" of Chechen villages, which led to horrendous civilian casualties. Despite President Vladimir Putin's claims to the contrary, the war rages on, with sabotage and suicide bombings the daily fare. The morale of the Russian troops is not simply bad; it is often mutinous. On the one hand, corrupt Russian commanders do a brisk business selling arms to the enemy. On the other, Russian conscripts, often left unpaid, have been known to fire on their own command posts—something Maier reports having witnessed with his own eyes.

It is something of a relief when Meier leaves Chechnya behind for the far north. What he finds there is also bleak, but not nearly so discouraging. The Norilsk Nickel conglomerate is staffed by descendants of the Gulag slaves sent there to mine metals by Stalin. Although employees of this now-privatized corporation are paid high salaries by Russian standards, the industry is in the process of being downsized and workers are being forced out. Still, some of the locals Meier meets seem to take pride, despite the extreme cold and the air laced with chemical pollutants, in living in such a desolate place. When the World Bank offered loans to resettle residents in 2001, not a single one left.

Sakhalin, the next leg of Meier's journey, forms yet another sharp contrast. The island has a mild climate, is rich in natural beauty, timber, fish, and wildlife, and has even benefited from the most ambitious foreign investment in Russia to date: an offshore oil concession worth billions. Yet "everyone who can," a local woman tells Meier, "moves away." Sakhalin has seen its population drop precipitously since the early 1990's, after government funding for the fishing and forestry combines was cut. As Koreans, Japanese, and other foreign oilmen arrive, those able-bodied locals who remain have mostly taken to drink.

From the Far East, Meier's narrative moves back to Moscow and then, by night train, to St. Petersburg. Meier senses a dark omen in the number of abandoned villages along the well-traveled route between the two cities, where, "after years of nocturnal silence . . . the wolves had returned to rule." It is a fitting metaphor for St. Petersburg, a battered city often referred to as Russia's crime capital. The centerpiece of Meier's chapter is the still-unsolved contract murder of the liberal politician Galina Starovoitova in 1998, the sixth Duma deputy killed since 1993.

Tourists visiting St. Petersburg or Moscow today may get the impression of prosperous Western normality—there is even a craze for sushi bars—but in Meier's view, this is only a Potemkin façade. The colossally expensive restoration of imperial St. Petersburg for the celebration of its

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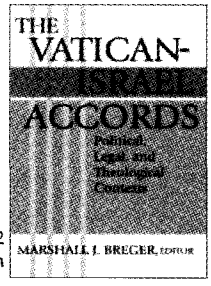

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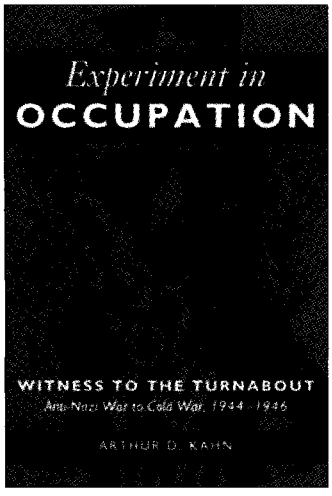

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As a participant in many of the events he writes about in *Experiment in Occupation*, Arthur Kahn offers a detailed account of the process by which the fight against Nazism came to be transformed into the Cold War. His story reveals how those in the Military Government of Germany who were dedicated to a thorough democratization of Germany were ultimately defeated in their confrontation with powerful elements in the Military Government and in Washington who were more intent upon launching a preemptive war against the Soviet Union than upon the eradication of Nazism and German militarism.

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300th anniversary last year was, he writes, emblematic of Putin's efforts to remake the country "in a false image." The suffering of the slaves who built the city, the horrors of Communism, the present-day epidemics of AIDS and tuberculosis, the "national health crisis" of a "rising deathrate and [a] falling birthrate"—all were swept under the rug. As for the atmosphere of historical and political openness under Mikhail Gorbachev and in the early Yeltsin years, that now appears to have thoroughly dissipated. "Amnesia," many Russians tell Meier, "relieves pain like little else."

MEIER IS an engaging companion on this tour of Russia during its new time of troubles, drawing out Russians' humanity and humor in the midst of even the bleakest circumstances. He clearly likes Russians as a people, even if he thinks little of their economic or political prospects. And how can we not sympathize with characters like the stubborn native of Chelyabinsk, site of an atomic disaster in the 1950's, who, even while coughing up blood, laughs as he tells Meier he hails from the "warm heart of the nuclear world"?

It is when Meier moves from description to diagnosis and prognosis that his considerable journalistic talent comes up short. On some occasions he reveals a penchant for loose insinuation. His Chechnya chapter, for example, introduces several sensational allegations. The first, that Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) itself planted the apartment terror bombs used by Putin as a pretext for launching the second war in Chechnya in 1999, has already been investigated by numerous Russian journalists. The second, a dramatic tale of corruption in the Russian army, is less familiar. Both have the most ominous implications for Russia's future, but, having put them before us, Meier infuriatingly declines to offer an opinion about whether they are false or true.

Meier is similarly coy about Putin. Suggesting that the Russian leader is encouraging the formation of a new personality cult, he introduces us to a Putin-inspired youth group, "Moving Together," that keeps a list of approved "patriotic writers" and another index of proscribed "trash literature." But it hardly seems fair to account for the Russian president's popularity in this way. By all accounts, Putin is genuinely liked and respected by most ordinary Russians for his sobriety and strong leadership qualities. The outcome of the recent parliamentary elections was certainly shaped by the biased government-influenced media, but the rout of Russia's liberals has been under way for some time. The pro-Putin landslide at the polls merely confirmed it.

IF MEIER at times strains to emphasize the dark side of things, his glumness is typical of those who once hoped to see Russia rapidly emerge as a liberal democracy in the Western mold. A similar shift from optimism to pessimism can be observed in a number of other American journalists. In the pages of the *New Yorker*, the once euphoric David Remnick grew increasingly shrill in his denunciations of Boris Yeltsin's "betrayal" of reform. An even more acute note of despair was struck by Jeffrey Taylor in a deeply personal cover story for the *Atlantic* in 2001, revealingly titled, "Russia Is Finished."

But Russia, even as depicted in Meier's mostly grim account, is clearly not finished. Yes, horrendous conditions can be found almost everywhere one turns, but so can evidence of resilience and recovery. Russia's birthrate, though still extremely low, bottomed out in 2000, and since then has been rising steadily—a fact overlooked by Meier. Still more encouraging are developments in the economic realm. In January of this year, the Central Bank announced a major decline in capital flight from Rus-

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sia, down to approximately $3 billion in 2003 from almost $15 billion two years earlier. Gold and currency reserves are at record levels. The country's rate of economic growth is more than respectable. These could be temporary upticks, but they could also herald a revival in national confidence, one that is occurring because of, not in spite of, Putin's illiberal tendencies.

As for the political arena, it would be foolish to expect much resemblance to our own style of rule in a land battered by decades of tyranny. But even here the last word is far from being written, with much depending on further developments both in the economy and in the realm of simple security. If the oil boom continues, and army morale ever recovers from the Chechen debacle, Meier's elegant chronicle may one day be read with nostalgia for a time when we worried about Russia's weakness rather than its renewed strength.

Groupthink

Affirmative Action Around the World: An Empirical Study
by Thomas Sowell
Yale. 231 pp. $28.00

Reviewed by
Carl Cohen

Among contemporary economists and social theorists, one of the most prolific, intellectually independent, and iconoclastic is Thomas Sowell, now a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. In nearly a half-century's worth of books and essays, he has explored the cultures of the world and all the nooks and crannies of American society. Enormously learned, wonderfully clear-headed, he sees reality as it is, and flinches at no truth.

Affirmative Action Around the World is exactly what its title announces: an empirical study of what the consequences really are, and really have been, in the five major nations in which "affirmative action"—the term now commonly used to denote ethnic preferences—has been long ensconced: India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, and the United States.*

In each case, Sowell's presentation of the data is instructive and illuminating—and disturbing. Some themes recur: wherever ethnic preferences have been instituted, they have led to intergroup hostility, dishonesty, and further proliferation in spite of manifest failure. Reflecting on Sowell's data, I also observe that each nation's experience offers a powerful lesson with respect to one particular aspect of the results produced. Here follow five painful lessons.

In India, ethnic preferences have been established longer than in any other nation. "Positive discrimination" goes back to British rule, and was built into the Indian constitution in 1947. Originally intended to last for only twenty years, the preferences have been extended repeatedly in time. Originally devised to benefit only "untouchables" (a now forbidden term, replaced by "scheduled castes" or "Dalits"), they have been repeatedly expanded in reach. The benefits are no longer regarded as transitory; the beneficiaries, including members of many other "backward classes," now comprise more than *three-quarters* of the Indian population.

Carl Cohen *is professor of philosophy at the University of Michigan. His most recent book is a debate with James P. Sterba,* Affirmative Action and Racial Preference *(Oxford).*

* Although Sowell accepts this common equation of ethnic preference and affirmative action, there are many varieties of affirmative action (originally understood as efforts to *uproot* residual preference) that are morally right and not preferential. The term itself has been kidnapped by the advocates of preference, and I would not accede to the capture.

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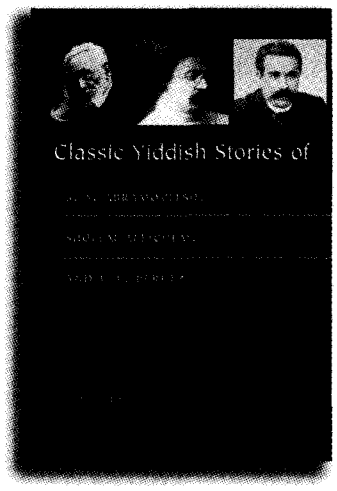

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Preferential quotas have been limited by Indian courts to 50 percent of the available places at universities and elsewhere; but making use of those quotas requires "complementary resources" of education that the intended beneficiaries simply do not have. Therefore, the quotas for the most seriously deprived in India often go unfilled. On the other hand, quotas for "other backward classes" rarely go unfilled. Upshot: the great majority of the reserved places go to those who deserve them least.

Only deep inner change would enable members of the beneficiary groups to utilize the places preferentially reserved for them. But, as Sowell points out, there is "no political mileage to be made by telling people to change themselves." Expedience rules; Indian politicians buy support by confirming preferences and extending them to more and more ethnic groups. Enlargement is the easiest course.

What then do we learn from the Indian experience? *Race preference does not wind down; it winds up. Proliferation is the rule.*

NEXT, MALAYSIA, where Chinese laborers were first brought to the peninsula to work the rubber plantations, Indian laborers to work the tin mines. Both have become substantial ethnic minorities, with Malays remaining the great majority. The three groups are quite distinct.

The Chinese, adopting a frugal style and investing heavily in the education of their children, pulled themselves from the plantations and built businesses across the country; they have come to dominate retail establishments in Malaysia, of which they owned 85 percent by 1980. Corporate ownership by Chinese has also soared. Chinese incomes are double those of Malays.

In 1965, Malaysians willingly divested themselves of a great mass of powerful Chinese by expelling Singapore, which became a separate country and remains very largely a Chinese city—and greatly prosperous. But, although the expulsion of Singapore made the Malay majority politically secure, and somewhat reduced its economic domination by the Chinese minority, it did not stop the intellectual advance of the Chinese who remained. In 1969, more than half the officers in the Malaysian army were ethnic Chinese; as long as university admissions were determined by examination results, only 20 percent of the places went to Malays, and most of the rest to ethnic Chinese.

The majority, competing unsuccessfully, had to be protected. The Malay government set out to achieve racial balance in employment, giving formal preferences to Malays in hiring. But there seemed no alternative to continuing reliance on the better-educated Chinese and Indian minorities in fields where their technical skills were needed. And so admission to universities was altered as well. Group membership was emphasized over individual performance, and, to increase the number of Malays yet further, the Malay language became the only medium of instruction in schools as well as in universities.

The ethnic preferences that have pervaded Malaysia in recent decades were not designed to pull an oppressed minority from the depths; their purpose was to protect the relatively less competent majority from the intellectual and economic advances of more competent ethnic minorities. What, then, do we learn from Malaysia? We learn that *the inferior performance of some ethnic groups is not always a consequence of discrimination against them.* On the contrary, even the imposition of discriminatory advantages favoring a *majority* can-

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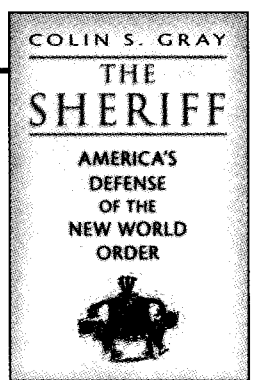

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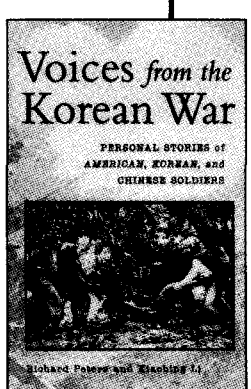

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not obscure the fact that some groups prove less competent than others.

Sri Lanka, in the second half of the 20th century, experienced a steep social deterioration whose exact causes are difficult to specify. What began as ethnic tension between the Sinhalese majority in the south and the Tamil minority in the north became bloody slaughter. The substantial preferences given to the Sinhalese (awarded, as in Malaysia, to protect a less competent majority) certainly played a role in exacerbating these tensions.

In Sri Lanka, group rights had become a tool to win Sinhalese votes. The more recently arrived Tamils, clustered in the highlands, were flatly disenfranchised. To overcome inferior majority performance, group preferences were introduced in university admissions. Even so, the edge of Tamils in the sciences and other intellectual endeavors remained substantial, and so preference next took the form of race-norming. University admissions were based not on actual scores but on each applicant's "standardized score," determined by his performance relative to the performance of other students in the same ethnic group. When that device proved insufficient as well, "district quotas" were introduced (a variant of what is done today in Texas), whereby admissions were allocated by geographic region. Since Sinhalese and Tamils were concentrated in different districts, this was simply a backhand method of establishing ethnic quotas.

Protests against preferences in Sri Lanka mounted but were unsuccessful. Concluding that only in a separate nation could their success be recognized, the Tamils pressed for secession, first with militancy, and then with bloodshed. The once-tranquil island was afflicted with widespread pillage, murder, rape.

Deliberately exacerbating racial tensions for the sake of political gain—we learn from the case of Sri Lanka—*promotes hatred of a kind and of a degree almost impossible to reverse.* What begins with race preference ends with race riots.

And then there is Nigeria, a nation encompassing a vast array of diverse ethnic groups and regions—largely Islamic in the north, largely Christian in the south. Before colonial rule it was never a country; af-

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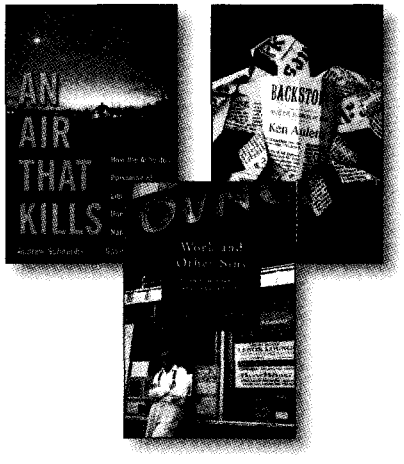

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ter colonial rule, the changing governments of Nigeria have regularly practiced favoritism toward one or another of the scores upon scores of tribes and ethnic groups.

Preferences and quotas are justified in Nigeria by the demand, expressly formulated in the constitution of 1979, that national activities should "reflect the federal character of the country." This "federal character" principle has been extended to school admissions, to promotions in school, and even to membership on the national soccer team. Every activity must "look like Nigeria." Intergroup tensions have become very sharp; almost every policy issue becomes a matter of racial dispute accompanied by charges of ethnic corruption. These disputes often turn bitter, and become fights.

Whence the rancor? Economic disparities do not account for it. Sowell points out that in the 1990's, when the Katafs, formerly lagging behind the Hausa, closed the gap between the two groups, relations became more polarized, not less. The slightest disagreement has tended to explode into violence, and the same sensitivity appears among other groups as well. Violence is produced, it seems, by the politicization of ethnic differences; and that politicization commonly takes the form of preferential treatment.

One byproduct of this strife has been the creation of more states within the country. To reduce discord, separate ethnic enclaves have been carved out and given formal status. Thus, having given rise to a deadly spoils system, ethnic heterogeneity is mitigated by a gerrymandered homogeneity. The lesson from Nigeria? *When racial balance is advanced by granting preferences that are deeply resented, diversity produces not greater racial harmony but greater racial conflict.*

ONE THREAD runs through all four of these case histories. We are often invited to suppose, almost as an axiom, that every ethnic group is possessed of equal talent with every other and will therefore, if given equal chances, perform with equivalent competence. Disparate numbers by group (in employment or education) are taken to be a sure sign of oppression, and proportionality thus becomes the unquestioned standard of fair play. This thinking is the product of an egalitarianism ungrounded in empirical inquiry.

The reality, driven home by Sowell's excruciating reports, is very different. In fact, for a host of reasons, some of which we know and some of which we do not know, some of which spring from malign oppression and many of which do not, ethnic and racial groups behave differently, perform differently, learn differently, and exhibit greatly different talents and temperaments. That is not crude stereotyping; it is plain fact. Justice will not be done if this fact is denied or goes unrecognized. In giving us this great lesson with the aid of overwhelming evidence and a scrupulously dispassionate mind, Thomas Sowell is our finest teacher.

The fifth of the five great nations dealt with in this book is the United States of America. The appropriate lesson(s) here? *All of the above.*

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Why Must College Be So Costly?

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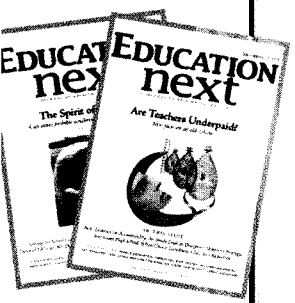

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In 1987, touring colleges with my kids, I was shaken by two realities: first, the absence of any sort of productivity gains in higher education, amid an economy whose principal engine of growth was (and remains) improved output per unit of worker input; second, the tendency of U.S. colleges to compete for desirable students by adding upscale amenities, what a Mount Holyoke dean once termed the "Chivas Regal strategy." (During our campus visits, my daughter remarked that it was like comparing resort hotels.)

My own children are—fortunately—finished with all that, but the idea of creating some stripped-down, no-frills college models seems even more apt today. What would such places look like? Key features would include a lean administration, few nonteaching employees, and most campus jobs performed by students or outsourced; amenities (entertainment, food courts, fancy gyms, etc.) left to entrepreneurs—and paid for by those who use them; a year-round calendar with facilities in constant use, steady work for employees, and the opportunity for energetic students to finish faster; faculty that are paid well but worked hard; a trimmed-down curriculum with a solid core and strong majors in a dozen fields but no pretense of teaching everything; and rigorous exit standards with diplomas equivalent to an intellectual "warranty." This model could serve as a plausible formula for containing the cost and price of higher education and eking some productivity gains from this enterprise.

What's happened since 1988, however, seems noteworthy on four fronts.

First, yesterday's troubling trends have intensified. Students take ever longer to complete their degrees. The academic week and year grow ever shorter as amenities grow yet more lavish (indoor climbing walls?).

Second, whereas the price pain then was felt primarily by those at private campuses, today the public university price tag is soaring, too.

Third, higher education has developed a fast-growing sector that follows the no-frills formula: the for-profit sector, characterized by the University of Phoenix and kindred vendors of reasonably efficient and relatively inexpensive postsecondary schooling.

Fourth, technology enables students to avail themselves of higher education without ever showing up on campus. The for-profit sector makes expert use of this delivery system, but traditional universities are working at it, too. Because distance learning makes it possible not only to slash campus expenses but also to extend a professor's "reach" to far more students, it serves willy-nilly to boost academic productivity.

As Congress and state legislatures seek to contain the cost of college, they may want to encourage more no-frills institutions and nudge more students toward the efficient providers. The starting point is to cease treating traditional college economics as immutable and instead to recognize that society has an obligation to reward efficiency and productivity here just like it does everyplace else.

—Chester E. Finn Jr.

Chester E. Finn Jr. is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution; chairman of Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education; and president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

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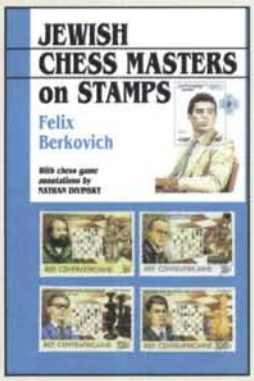

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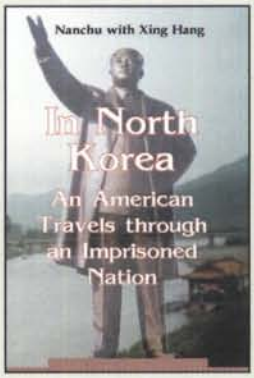

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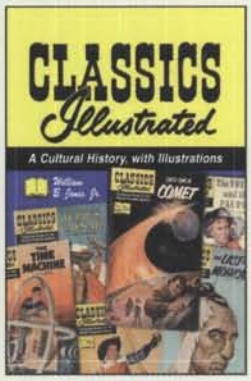

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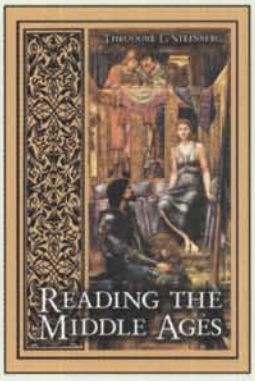

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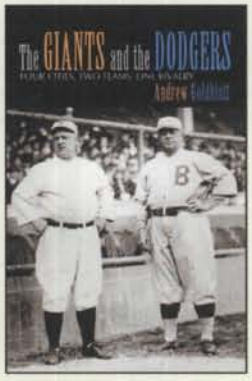

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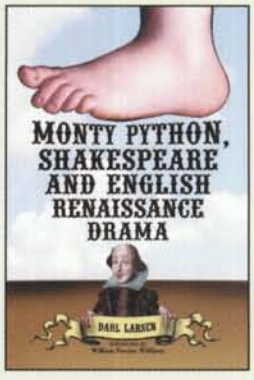

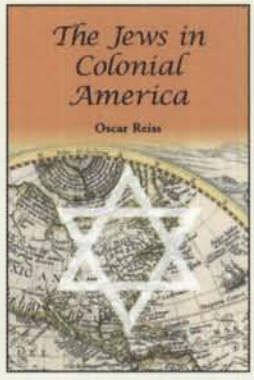

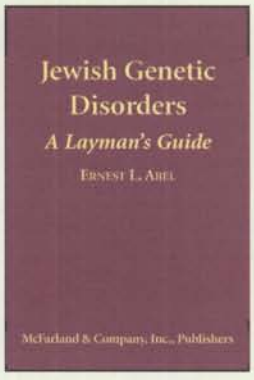

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